

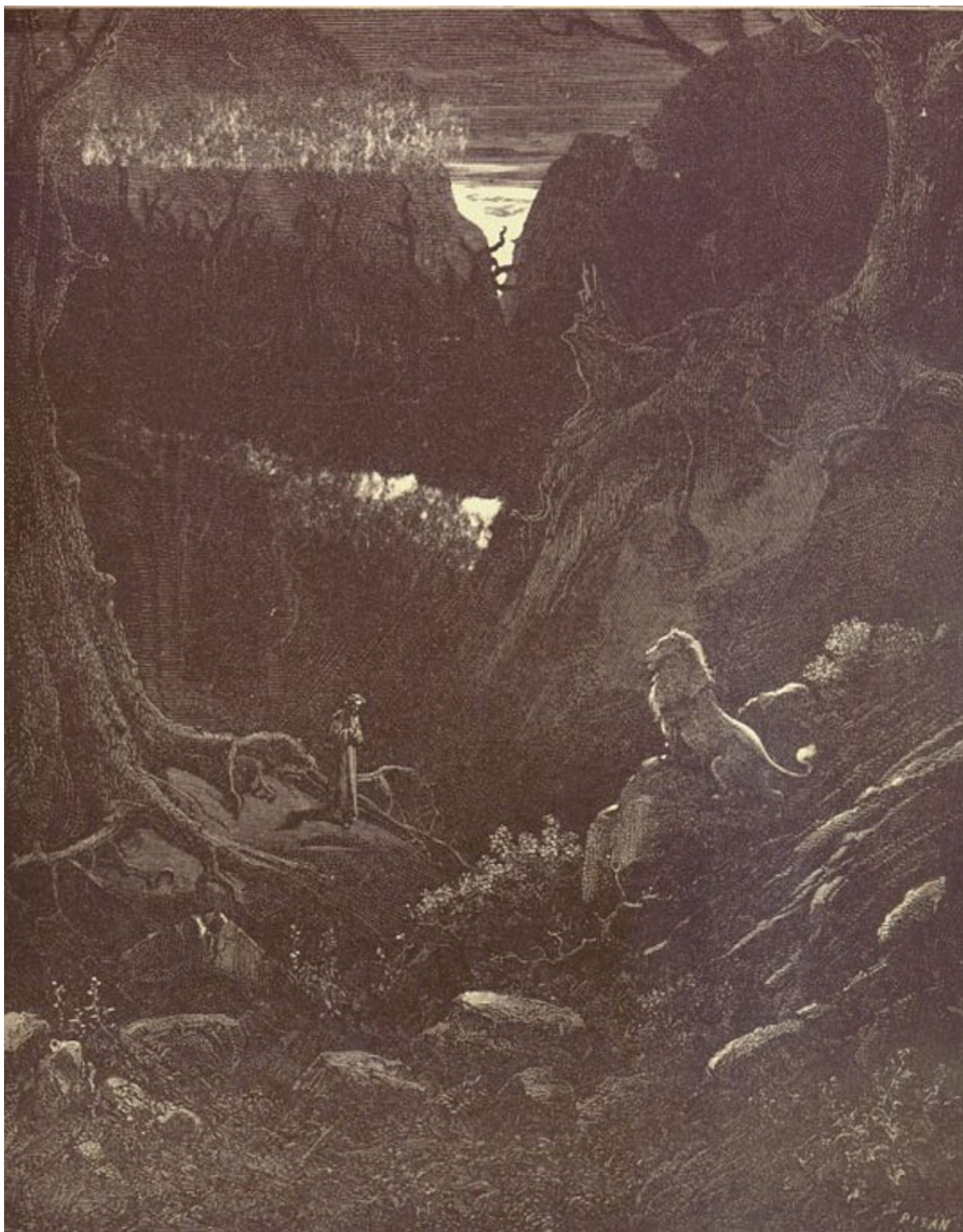
The Inferno

From the Divine Comedy of Dante Alligheri , The Florentine

A NOTE FROM THE TRANSLATORS -

This book is a transcript of the audio book :The Divine Comedy Trilogy: The Inferno, Purgatory, Paradise Plus a Life of Dante: by Heathcote Williams. Enchanted by the audio, we did this transcription to share with you. We hope you can forgive us for any mistakes in it, we are not professionals at this. And anybody is welcome to improve it. We also hope the author can forgive us for any mistakes in the transcription and releasing this book. It is not our intention to cause a loss to the author or the publishing company. If you have the means to do so, please buy the original CD as well. And if you like this book, please spread it to those you feel may benefit from it.

Canto I



Midway upon the course of this our life I found myself within a gloomy wood. For I wandered from the path direct. Who could relate how wild this wood was. It is so hard to say how stark and rough. The very thought of it renews my fears so bitterly that death seems almost near. How I came to be there I cannot say for sure. I was so deeply bound by sleep as I departed from the path of truth.

But when I saw that I have come to stand below a hill closing off the valley which had set the sting of fear in my heart, I looked up, to see there, its summit touched already by that planet's shining beam that guides man's footsteps on every path. Then was the fear a little quieted that in my heart had lain, weighing on me all through that dreadful night. And like a man who crawling from the sea upon the shore breathes slow and weakly, then turns to regard the dangerous water, my soul, which urged me onward to further flight, then turned back to contemplate the way by which I came, which none was ever known to leave alive.

I rested a while my weary body. Then up the desolate rise, pursued my way. But scarcely had I begun my climbing when out sprang a leopard, swift and nimble covered by a fine fur and dappled hide. Always it crept before me. My way was blocked so thoroughly that time after time I turned about to make my safe retreat. But the hour was early. The rising sun displacing the stars which glitter with that love divine offered me encouragement and some hope regarding that beast with the spotted coat. Yet not so much that the vision of a lion appearing to me did not terrify.

He seemed to rush at me with head erect, roaring so with hunger even the air itself seemed filled with fear. Then a she-wolf but in her meagreness appeared to bear the sum of every want instilled such fear and anxiety in my heart that now I lost all hope of reaching the summit. No peace was offered by that hungry beast. It came at me and pressed me back and down to where the sun is mute.

Now as I fled down to the lower ground, before my eyes one came in sight who seemed to have become voiceless from silence over long maintained. I cried out to him “Take pity on me, whatever you are, man or simply shade!”.

“No man.” he answered. “Once I was a man, I was born under Julius, though late and lived in Rome when good Augustus reigned along with false and lying deities. I was a poet. I sang of that just son of Anchises who came from Illion when haughty Troy was set ablaze. But why are you returning to such torment. Why do you not climb up this blissful mountain, the source and origin of every joy?”

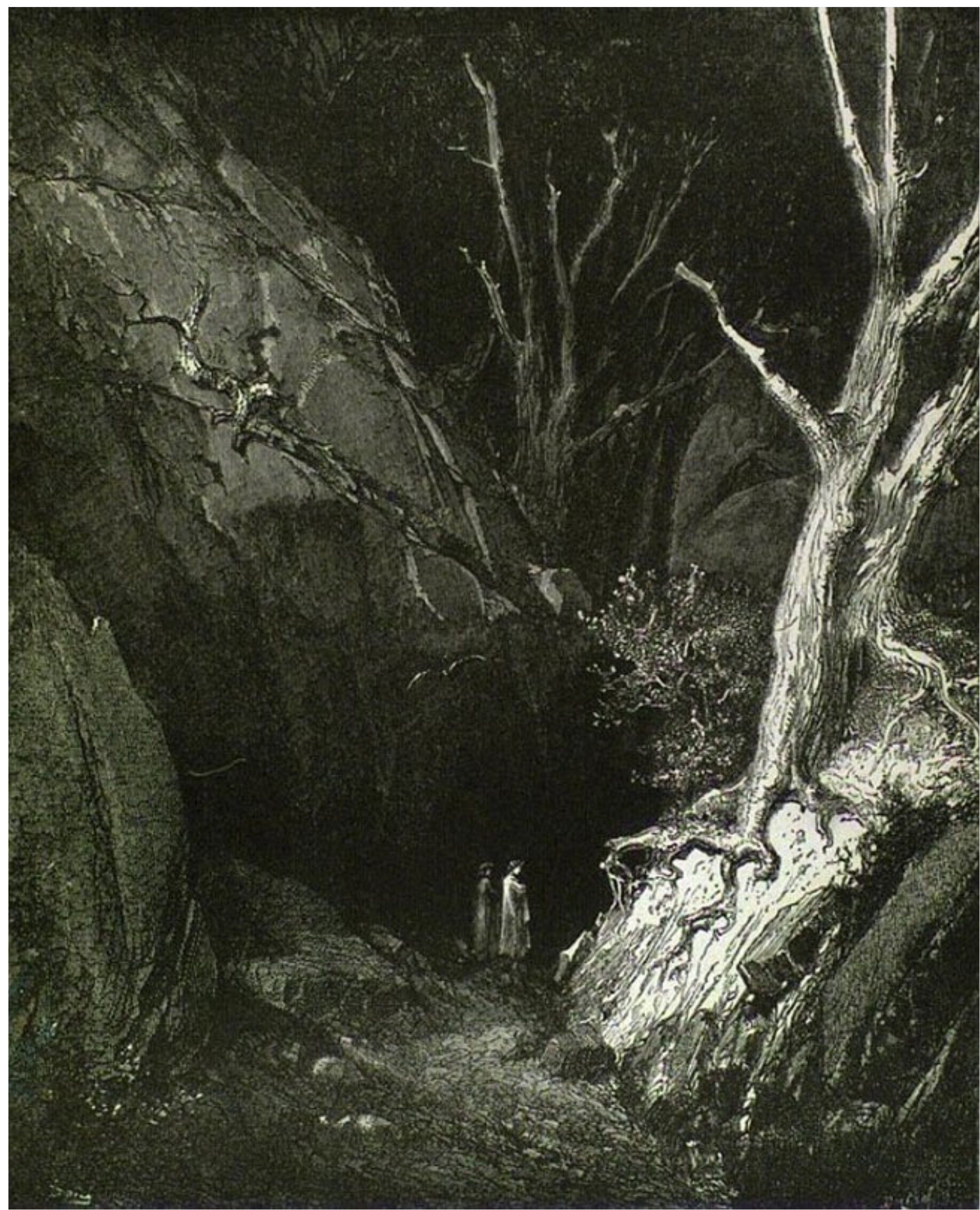
“Can you be Virgil? You that fountain from which floats a rich a river of speech.” I answered overcome and bowed my head. “Oh light and glory of all poets since! I pondered at your verses with such great love. From you alone I learnt the noble style through which honour has been awarded me. Look at this beast from which I turned away. Help me teacher! Protect me from her who sets my pulses trembling through their veins.”



“You must follow another path” he said as he saw me weeping there “if you wish to escape this wild place. The beast against whom you raise your cry will not let living souls pass by this way. She kills them. So vicious is her nature and so grim. Her craving will is never satisfied. Each meal makes her hungrier than before. She mates with many other creatures and will go on mating with many more. Yet that grey hound comes who brings her painful death. He will not feed himself on land or gold but wisdom, love and virtue. He comes to save the Italy for which Camilla died a maid, and Euryalus, Nisus and Turnus bled. Through every city he will hunt her back to hell where envy loosed her first. So for your own good I think you ought to follow me. I will guide you through an eternal place where you will hear harsh noises of despair, where you will see long departed spirits each one screaming of their second death. Then there be those who lie content in fire, because they hope someday to wander among the blessed to whom if you truly wish to climb, a soul worthier than I will lead you. I will leave you with her and then return because the emperor who reigns above will not admit me to his varsity, since, living, I rebelled against his law. In every place he reigns. There he rules, there is his seat, there is his lofty throne, happy is the man who choses to be there.”

I said to him “Poet please by that God I beseech you, the God you did not know. Help me to escape this evil and worse, lead me to the place you have spoken of so I may gaze upon St. Peter’s gate and those you say who languish in such pain.”

He moved on and I went after him.



Canto II



Day was departing and the fading light allowed the beasts that walk and crawl the earth to cease their labour. I, one man alone was gathering up my powers to maintain the struggle with the road, an unbearable pity which faithfully, my memory shall recall.

“Poet you are my guide.” I then began “Tell me if I am worthy before you commit me to this fearful journey. You wrote that young Silvius's father dressed still in living flesh went to the infernal place and with all his faculties intact. But I, why should I go, who permits it? I am no Aenas, I am no Paul. Nor I nor others deem me that worthy. Why should I embark upon this journey? I fear a foolish ending. You are wise. You understand more than my words express.”

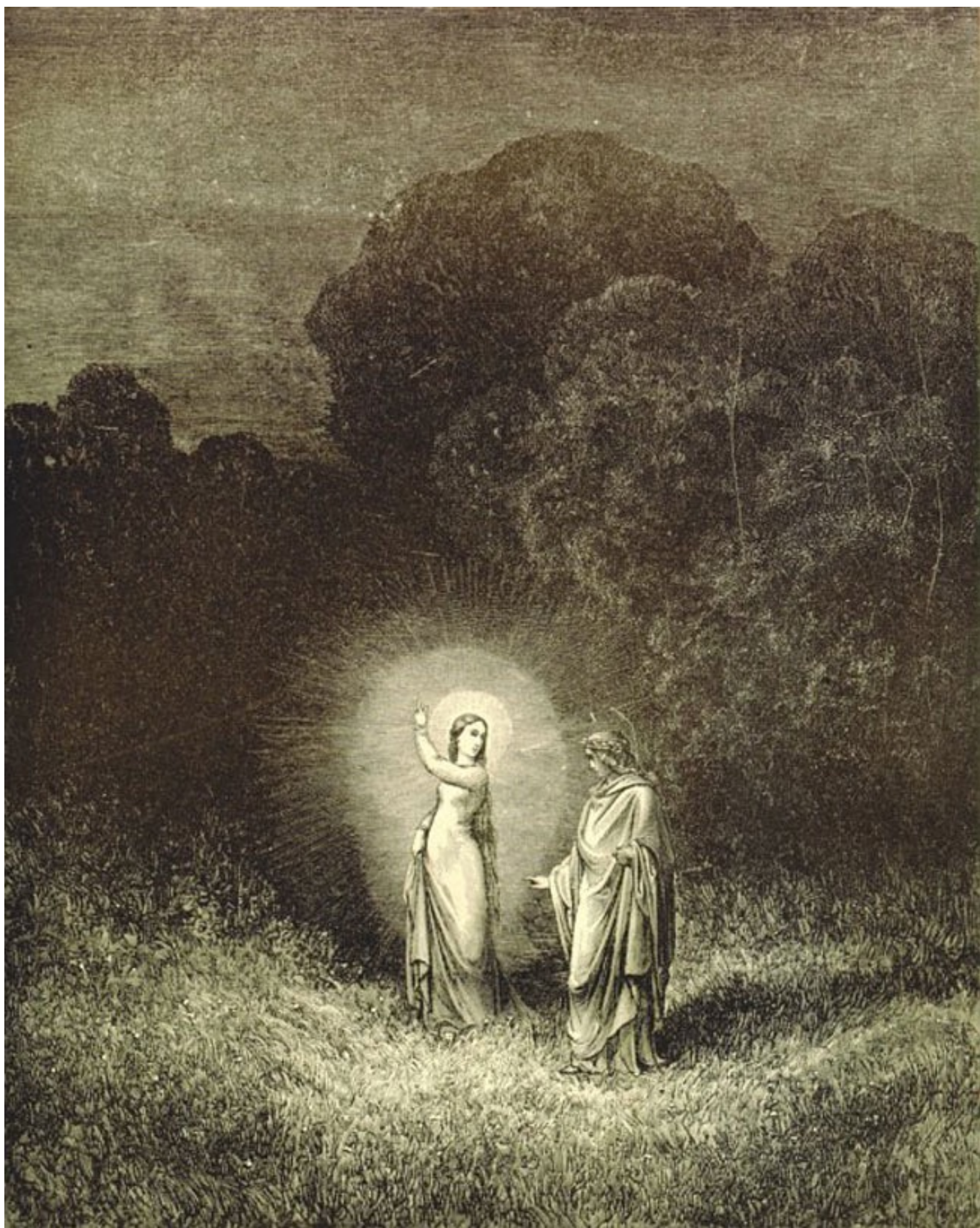
And as a man who un-wills what he willed, changing his plan because of second thoughts, standing upon that dim slope, so did I.

“If I have truly understood your words” The shade generously answered “your soul is burdened with that sense of cowardice which often encumbers man turning him from more honourable enterprises like a frightened beast shying in the dusk. Let me explain and free you from your fears. I would tell you the reasons am here, and what I heard to make me pity you. I was with the dead who are in suspense when a Lady most blessed and beautiful summoned me. I implored her to command. Angelic, with eyes more bright than stars, she began addressing me in a tone gentle and low, with words of her own tongue,

‘O courteous spirit of Mantua whose fame lives on within the world and will while creation still endures, a friend of mine though not of fortune is so beset upon his journey up the desert slope by obstacles, his dread has turned him around. Even now I fear he may be so strayed that I have come too late to give him succor, so stir yourself and with your polished phrase and what else is needful for his escape, go to his aid. Then I will be consoled. I am Beatrice, who urges you to go. Love urged me on and Love now makes me speak. When I stand again before my Lord in Heaven, I shall sing your praises to him.’ She fell silent then, I began to speak ‘Virtuous Lady I am so happy to obey at your behest, that were it already done, that would still be too slow. But tell me how you dared to descend falling down to this centre from the open space to where your zeal is burning to return.’ ‘As you ask, I will explain briefly.’ She replied ‘I come here without fear, since fear is inspired only by harmful things, not because they are fearsome in themselves. God in his grace gave me such a nature that torment such as yours will not touch me. Flames of hell fire have no power against me. A noble Lady in Heaven, grieves at this impediment to which I send you. It is her pity, breaks its stern decree. She sent Lucia with her request saying ‘Beatrice, your faithful one now needs you. I commend him to your care.’ Lucia an enemy to everything cruel, moved and came to where I sat beside Rachael ancient of years. Then she said to me ‘Will you not help him who loved you so much? He left the common crowd because of you. Do you not hear his pitiful complaint, do you not see the death that haunts him, there by that river the sea cannot conquer?’ No one on earth was

so swift to run from loss or reap reward as I on hearing such words uttered. Down I came leaving my blissful seat to put trust in your noble speech which honours you and honoured those who had it.' She turned away then, once she had spoken. Her shining tearful eyes made me all the swifter in coming. So I come for you at her request, to free you from the wild beast that blocked the way that leads directly up the blissful hill. What is wrong? Why do you delay here? Why nurse your cowardice within your heart? Why do you not display a dauntless zeal? Since three such blessed ladies care for you within the court of Heaven and my words too bring promise of such good things."

As drooping flowers closed by chilly night, rise upon the stalk with the shining sun, my spirits rose and my failing powers. A bolt of warming courage struck my heart like one set free of fear. I cried to him "Oh Gracious Lady who chose to help me and you, kindly one, obeying so quick those words of truth she uttered in your ears. My heart is moved. At your speech I am filled again with a desire to carry on and follow you. I have recovered my original purpose. Lets press on. Between us now there is a single will. You are my guide, my teacher and my lord." These were my words. So following behind I entered on that steep and savage path.



Canto III



I AM THE WAY TO THE CITY OF THE WOE.
I AM THE WAY TO ETERNAL PAIN.
I AM THE WAY TO A DESERTED RACE.
JUSTICE INSPIRED MY MIGHTY ARCHITECT.
OMNIPOTENCE DIVINE CONSTRUCTED ME WITH
ALMIGHTY WISDOM AND PRIMAL LOVE.
BEFORE ME NOTHING WAS CREATED BUT THOSE
THINGS ETERNAL.
I ENDURE FOR EVER.
ABANDON ALL HOPE, YOU, WHO ENTER HERE.

This bleak message I saw carved and painted above a portal. “What hard words master.” I said. He from experience answered “Now you must lay behind you every fear. Here all the cowardice in you must die. This is the place I spoke of. Souls suffer here who lost the good of intellect.”

And taking my hand in his and smiling comfort he led me through the secret things. The starless air resounded here with sighs and echoed with strange shrieks and lamentations. They made me weep at first, these anguished cries. These vile voices deep and hoarse and angry. Joined with beating hands the babbling chorus raised a twisting tumult that revolved unceasing through the timeless mirk like sand that eddies round and round a whirlwind storm.

“Master” I said circled by the horror “What is that I hear? Who are these that seem so overcome with grief.” And he replied “These wretched souls are those who while they lived achieved neither blame nor praise. Mingled with them is that evil band of angels who are neither rebels nor found true to God. They were faithful to themselves alone. Heaven cast them out for imperfection. But hells’ deeps would not receive them. The damned souls might glory over them.”

And I asked “What torment do they suffer that causes such loud lament?” “They have no hope of death.” He answered “Their blind life is so shameful any other fate fills them with envy. No memory of these persists on earth. They are

restrained by justice and pity. Enough. Lets not talk of them and with a glance pass on.”

I saw a banner then brush past whirling fiercely without a pause to take a stand. Behind it trailed multitudes of souls in such numbers I wondered that death had taken so many. I knew some looking closer. The shade of that coward who made the great refusal I recognised. And understood at once this company of evil ones was hateful to God unto his foes. These luckless shades who never really lived passed by unclothed goaded by hornet stings and wasps. Down their faces mingled blood and tears, food for the loathsome worms crawling at their feet. Looking beyond them, I saw the crowd that gathered on the bank of a great river.

“Master” I said “Who are these? What makes them so eager to cross?” and he said to me “All will be revealed to you when we pause upon the mournful banks of Acheron.”

I walked on abashed with downcast eyes fearing that my chatter had troubled him. I said nothing more until the river where coming towards us I saw a boat whose ancient white haired pilot shouted out “Woe to you, you wicked souls! Abandon here any thought of Heaven. I have come to lead you to the other bank. To everlasting darkness, fire and ice. You there, living soul, get away from these. They are the dead.”

But when he saw I made no move, he said “You shall not go by here. Reach the farther shore through another path by different gate. Take the lighter boat.”

“Charon control your anger!” said my guide “This is willed where will has every power. Do not seek to know any more.”

Silence then took the wooly cheeks of the pilot of that ghastly marsh whose eyes were circled round with glowing rings of fire. The spirits, naked, in despair then lost all colour and began to grind their teeth at such words of doom. They cursed God, their parents and all humanity. They cursed the place, the time, even their birth and the line that bore them. Then weeping clustered on the wicked bank which waits for every man who fears not God. Charon with his eyes blazing lines them up smacking the lagged sinners with his oar. And as in autumn when withered leaves fall one by one until only the bare branch remains as witness, so Adam’s wicked seed dropped into the boat and apart across the waters. Before they land there another starts collecting on this side.

“My son,” the master kindly said to me “All who die in God’s anger, anywhere, assemble here eager to cross the stream. Divine justice spurs them on by turning all their dread into desire. No good soul ever comes by here. If Charon complains now you know the meaning behind his words.”

After he had spoken the place shook so strongly the fearful memory makes me sweat. The tear stained earth discharged a sudden blast of wind and a flash of scarlet light which completely took my senses from me and I fell like one overcome with sleep.



Canto IV



A heavy clap of thunder startled me awake. Jumping to feet I looked around in the place I found myself. I stood at the very brink of the valley of pain that overflows with groans and endless tears. It was so dark and deep, so wrapped in cloud that though I strained to make out the bottom I could see nothing.

“Now” said the poet turning deathly pale “let us descend to this sightless world. I will lead, you follow.” I did not fail to notice the hue unveiled. “How can I go on if you are frightened? You! My comfort, my constant strength in doubt.” But he answered “The pain of those below paints my face with pity. It is not fear you see. Let us go on. Our road is long”. And then he turned and I went after him, down to the first circle of the abyss.

We heard no screaming here. The air trembled with the eternal sound of sighing but torment was not added to the sorrow burdening the swarming crowds of children, women and men. My master then said to me “You do not ask what are these spirits here. They are not sinners. But their lives alone however worthy were not enough without baptism, the key to your faith. If they lived before christianity, their worship of God was in some way wrong. Because of this, not sin, I belong here, among the lost. Suffering is ours only so far that we live without hope. But always with desire.”

When I heard these words great pity ceased my heart. Many souls of virtue are suspended in this limbo. I asked him then needing to be sure “Tell me master. Have any

other left to gain salvation either through the merit of their own or merit of another?”. Reading the thought behind my words he said “When I had only recently arrived I saw a man of power enter crowned with a sign of victory. He called to the shade of our first father and his son Abel, to Noah, and the lawgiver Moses, to the patriarch Abraham, David the kind, Israel and his father and sons, Rachael for whom he worked to win and many others and he made them blessed. Before these no human soul had ever gained the state of bliss.”

We walked as he spoke, on through souls set as close as far as trees until not far from where we had entered I saw the loom of light dispel the dark. Though we were not close, I could see vaguely that honourable souls gathered near by. “O glory of every science and art, who are these enjoying this privilege that separates them from the others here?” He said to me “The fame of their renown resounding above in the living world means they win grace from Heaven.”

Just then I heard a voice loudly proclaim “Honour the gloriest poet. His shade which left us is now returned”.

Four mighty shades approached, their faces showing neither joy nor sadness. My good master explained “Note the one who comes, sword in hand before the other three, as though he were their lord. He is Homer, prince of poets. The next is Horace, the satirist. Ovid is third, the last is Lucan. And because each one shares the honour that voice

proclaimed alone, they welcomed me, and dignify themselves.”

For a while they talked amongst each other then turned to gesture welcome. My guide smiled gently when he witnessed this. But even greater honour then was granted. They made me one of their own band. So I became the sixth in the company of such intellects. We walked on towards the light talking of things that would be wrong to mention here although it was fitting that we did there until we came beneath a great castle encircled seven times by lofty walls and moated by a sweetly flowing stream. This we crossed as if it was solid ground. Passed through seven gates and into a fresh green meadow.

Here people wandered with grave and tranquil eyes and a bearing that carried great authority. They spoke seldom and even then only softly. Then drawing to one side we reached a point higher up and well lit granting a view of everyone on that enamelled lawn. Displayed there with the spirits of the great a sight that my soul rejoices to have known. I saw Electra, standing with a throng, among whom were Hector and Aenas and Caesar fully armed and eagle eyed. With Penthesilea and Camilla in an another part, I saw king Latinus who sat with his daughter Lavinia. I saw that Brutus who drove Tarquin out. Lucretia, Julia, Marcia, Cornelia and sitting on his own Saladin. I looked a little higher up and saw the master of men of knowledge sitting surrounded by a philosophic group watching him with awe and veneration. Closer to him much nearer than the rest were Plato and Socrates. Then I saw Democritus,

who thought the world a chance. Diogenes, Anaxagoros, and Thales, Zeno, Empedocles, and Heraclitus, The Dioscorides who classified the natural qualities. Orpheus, Livy, Tuley, Seneca the moralist, Geometer Euclid, Ptolemy, Hippocrates and Galen, then Avicenna and Averroes, the author of the famous commentary. I cannot fully describe all of them, am so driven by my lengthy theme, my words most often understate the truth.

The group of six is now reduced to two. My wise guide leads me by a different path out of the quiet into the quivering air and to a place where no light ever shines.



Canto V



From the first circle I descended down to the second which encloses less space but greater stinging pain and much more grief. Horrifying Minos is there. He snarls at the entrance scrutinising sinners, judges, then damns with a twist of his tail. That is, when the evil soul comes to stand before him and confesses everything, he, an expert in sin decides the place allotted to it in hell. He winds his tail around his body as many times as levels through which the sinning soul must fall. They crowd before him and one by one each in turn come forward to hear their damning judgement. They speak, they listen and a hurl below!

“O you who come to pain-some domicile” cried Minos when he saw me, pausing in performance of his official duties. “Take care how you enter and whom you trust and do not be fooled by this wide gateway.” My guide replied “Why do you make such noise? Do not hinder him on his destined path for this is willed where power and will combine. Nothing else concerns you.”

Now I began to hear the sounds of pain and misery. I came upon a place where no light shone, which bellowed like a tempest beaten sea when warring winds attack. This hurricane of hell drives unceasingly, sweeping the souls along spinning them in twisting torment. As devastation faces them a scene erupts of chilling screams and tearful howls. They blaspheming against divine power. Condemned to this torment eternally I realised were sinners of the flesh, those who enslaved their reason to their lust. As when winter comes starlings winging high

are swept along in densely crowded flocks by the blast up and down here, now there, so the evil shades in that gale are blown without a hope of comfort, rest or love and just as cranes strung out in ordered line uttering their plaintiff call in flight, so I saw the wailing shadows pass me suspended on that turmoil.

I asked then, “Who are these people master, so punished by the black air?” He answered me like this “The first of those whose story you should hear was empress over many different lands and so addicted to her luxurious vice that she legalised every form of lust, so preventing her from being censored. She is Semiramis, whom as we read was wife to Ninus and his successor. She held a land where now the Sultan rules. That other one killed herself over love breaking her faith to Sichcaeus’s ashes. There, luscious Cleopatra and Helen, the cause of so many years of sorrow, great Achilles who lost his life in the struggle with love. There is Paris, Tristan.”

A thousand souls and more he showed to me, naming each one and pointing out the shades whom love had severed from this life of ours. When I heard my wise mentor name those knights and ancient ladies such pity took me that confusion overwhelmed my senses.



“Poet,” I began “I would like to speak with a couple who fly together. There! So lightly on the gale.”

He said to me “You shall see when they are closer to us, if you implore them by that love of theirs, the force which drives them they will come to you.”

The winds changed course. They were blown towards us. I raised my voice to them “Come, weary souls! Talk with us, unless it is forbidden.”

Just as doves with wings held high and stiff playing through the air drawn to their sweet nest by desire, these detached from dido’s flock and swept our way through the malignant air. Such was the strength of my tender summons.

“O gracious, benign living creature! To brave the loathsome dark and visit us. Were he our friend who stained the earth with blood, who is monarch of the universe, we would pray that he might grant you peace, since our dreadful plight roused you to pity us. Whatever pleases you to hear or speak, we will hear and speak about with you now while the wind is presently abated. The time where I was born is on the coast where the Po with all its attendant streams descends to find its rest. Love, swiftly learnt when the heart is gentle, fired my body, that fair form of which I am deprived now. It still offends me how it happened. Love which exempts from loving none that’s loved, so strongly entered me through pleasing him that,

look! Even now he does not leave me. Love led us both on



to a single death and Caina's depths await our assassin. “

I heard the story of those injured souls and bowed my head and held it bowed. Until the poet asked me “What are you thinking?” I said “What gentle thoughts, what strong desire brought them to the agony of this state.” Turning back to them I said “Francesca, your suffering makes me weep with pity, but tell me, at the time of those sweet sighs, how was love announced? What sign brought you to the worst stirring of dubious desire?”

And she said then “There is no greater pain and misery than to recall the time of happiness. He who guides you knows this. If you want to know the root of our love I would tell you but as I weep. One day for our amusement

we began to read the tale of Lancelot, captive of love. We were alone and without suspicion. But as we read, our eyes would lift to meet and the color drained from both our faces. Just one part was the cause of our ruin. The words were ‘He who loved so tenderly bent to kiss the smile for which he had pined.’ Then this man, now part of me for ever trembled and all quivering kissed my mouth. The book was galahad to us. The role of Galeotto was played by the author.”

And while this soul spoke the other wept. I swooned like a dying man from pity and fell as a body falls void of life.



Canto VI



As my memory, overcome by pity for those two lovers and their suffering, recovers from the sorrow which stunned it, I see new torments, anew tormented whichever way I move or turned the gaze.

It is the third circle I have entered where torrential rain beats down and heavy, cold and monotonous. Coarse hail and filthy sleet come pouring through the mirky atmosphere to soak the stinking earth on which they fall. Here is Cerberus, monstrous, vicious beast howling like a mongrel through all three throats over the drowning sinners of this place. His eyes blood red, his beard, a greasy black, his stomach sagging, tannins on his pores, he grasps the spirits, flays and tears at them. They whine as dogs do in the pouring rain, lying now with one shelter, now another, changing places with squirming misery. When the foul Cerberus caught sight of us his mouths gaped open with a show of fang and his limbs quivered uncontrollably. My guide stretched out his hands and grasping mud threw it in fistfuls down his greedy throats. Like a starving dog that barks its hunger but quiets once given food, all its effort directed to consumption, so daemon Cerberus, who bays upon these spirits with such thunder that they wish they were deaf, occupied his grotesque heads in eating.

We walked on spirits beaten to the ground by torrents, treading on the emptiness that had the look of solid human flesh. The sinners grovelled in the mire, all prone, except for one who sat up suddenly when he observed us passing in front of him.

“Oh you, being conducted through this hell!” He said “Do you not recall who I am? You began your life before mine ended. In the brighter life above, your city, almost bursting at the seams with envy, held me for her own. I was called Ciacco. And for my damning sin of gluttony as you see I waste away in this rain. Not only I, wretched soul, all of these suffer equal torment for the same sin.” Then he said nothing more. So I replied “Ciacco your plight is so pitiable. It weighs me down and moves me close to tears. But if you know tell me what will come of the people of that divided city. Does a single honest man remain there? And say, why do such fears, discord plague it?” He spoke “Lengthy strife will turn to blood shed. The country party will drive the other out and most brutally. Within three years they too will fall. And the first then prevail, helped by him who sailed trims to any breeze. And for sometime they will hold their heads high burdening the others with oppression regardless of humiliating pain. True men alone are just. They are ignored. Pride, envy, greed, these are the three sparks that ignite every other heart.” With this he brought his gloomy story to a close.

But I said “Go on, speak a little more. Farinata and Tegghiaio, worthy men, Jacopo Rusticucci, Arrigo, Mosca, and the others so bent on doing good, where are they? Tell me if the Heaven’s sweetness is theirs or does hell embitter them?”

“Below!” He said “They lie among the blackest souls. Drag lower yet for different sins, perhaps if you descend that far you will see them. But I beg when you return to sunlight in

the world above remember me please to mens' memories.
Now I will say nothing more nor I will see you again."

His gaze twisted into a squint which watched me for a while. He slumped and fell forward into the mire, sightless like all the rest. My guide remarked "He will not rise again until the blast upon the angelic trumpets heralds the coming of the great adversary. Each one will seek their dismal tomb once more, repossess their former flesh and form to hear what will echo eternally."

We passed across the bog of rain and shades unhurried, talking of the afterlife.

I said then "Master will these torments grow after the final judgement or lessen or will the torture be just as intense". And he "Remember your philosophy. It teaches that as a thing grows perfect, so it feels more pleasure, so too with pain. Though these cursed sinners can never know true perfection, they may expect their pain will be more perfect then, than it is now."

We walked on following the curving road round, speaking of more than I may relate here until we reached the place where it descends. There we discovered Plutus, the great enemy.



Canto VII



“PAPE. Satan, Pape Satan, Aleppo!” Plutus began, spluttering furious. Aware of everything, my gentle sage said to reassure me “Don’t let your fear defeat you for whatever powers he has he shall not stop us climbing down these rocks.” Then turning back to Plutus’s bloated face he shouted “A cursed wolf! Be quiet, swallow your venomous rage, choke on it, this journey to the abyss is decreed, where Micheal took his vengeance against the proud revolt.”

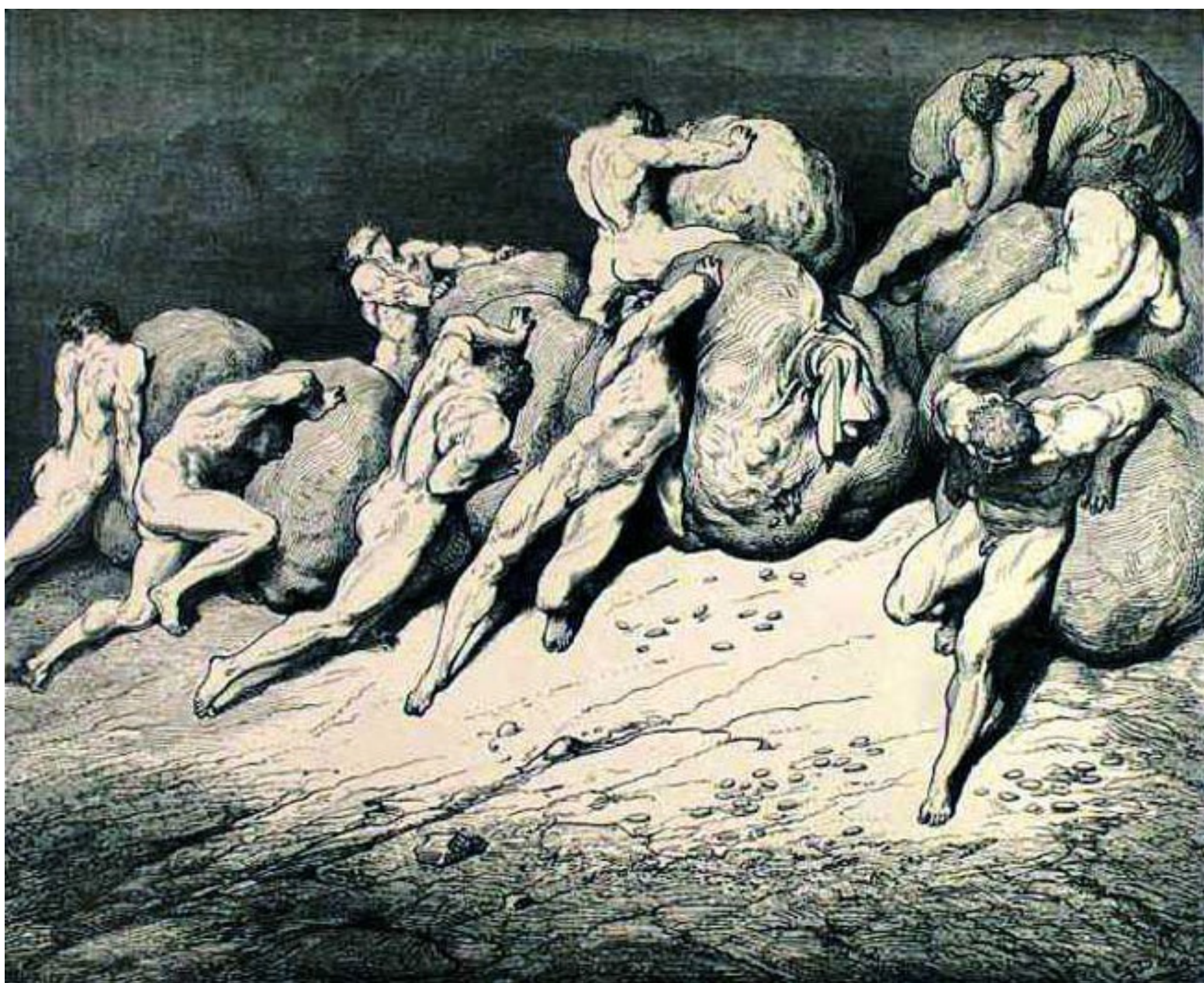
Just as bellied, wind filled sails collapse, deflated when the mast topples, tangled in a heap, that monster, so ferocious, crumpling, slumped to the ground. Then we descended to the fourth ditch heading deeper into the fearful trough where all the universe’s ills are stored.

Justice of God! Who could talk of those strange pains and torments that I have seen? Why do we let ourselves in for such guilt?

Just as each wave above Charybdis crashes against the other in its path, so souls here revolve in opposition. Here were greater crowds than I saw before, approaching from either side and groaning as their chests strained to roll great weights along. They met and crashed together. Then turned around and went the other way, one side screaming “Why hoard?” rebounding back came shouts “Why spend?” So still shouting they returned both ways around the dreadful circle until they clash again to trudge their round yet another joust and I my heart almost pierced with pity said “Master explain for me. Are the souls these

with shaven crowns ones to our left all clerics?” And he answered “These people all had mind so warped and twisted in their first life, they spent without thought of moderation. They scream this clear enough on their circle when their opposing guilts divide them. Those who have no hair covering their head were clergy, cardinals, popes, among whom avarice is the main besetting sin.”

“Master” I said “I want to recognise in such a group as this, a few of those who soiled themselves by evils of this kind”. He said “An empty hope, the life they led was undiscerning, it made them filthy, now it makes them unrecognisable. They will crash together eternally. Then on resurrecting from the tomb will rise. These with fists clenched tight, those with close cropped hair, spending and hoarding to excess, robbed them of the bright world and set them brawling here. Now my son, you see how brief is the farce enacted in pursuit of wealth, for things in fortune’s grasp squabbled over by men. For all the gold it is whatever was beneath the moon could never buy them rest, these wearied souls not a single moment. Let us descend now to deeper sorrows. The stars that were rising when I started are setting now and we must not loiter.”



We crossed the circle to the inner edge, passing a spring that gushed down a channel carved from the rock by the flowing water. The stream was cloudy darker than purple and we together with the mirky spill followed this strange passage in its descent.

On reaching the foot of the fearful slope, the melancholy stream drained into a swamp called Styx. Looking around me there, I saw people in that bog, naked, splattered with filth, their faces twisted by furious rage. They struck each other not only with their fists, but with their heads and their chests and with their feet and tore at each other's flesh with their teeth.

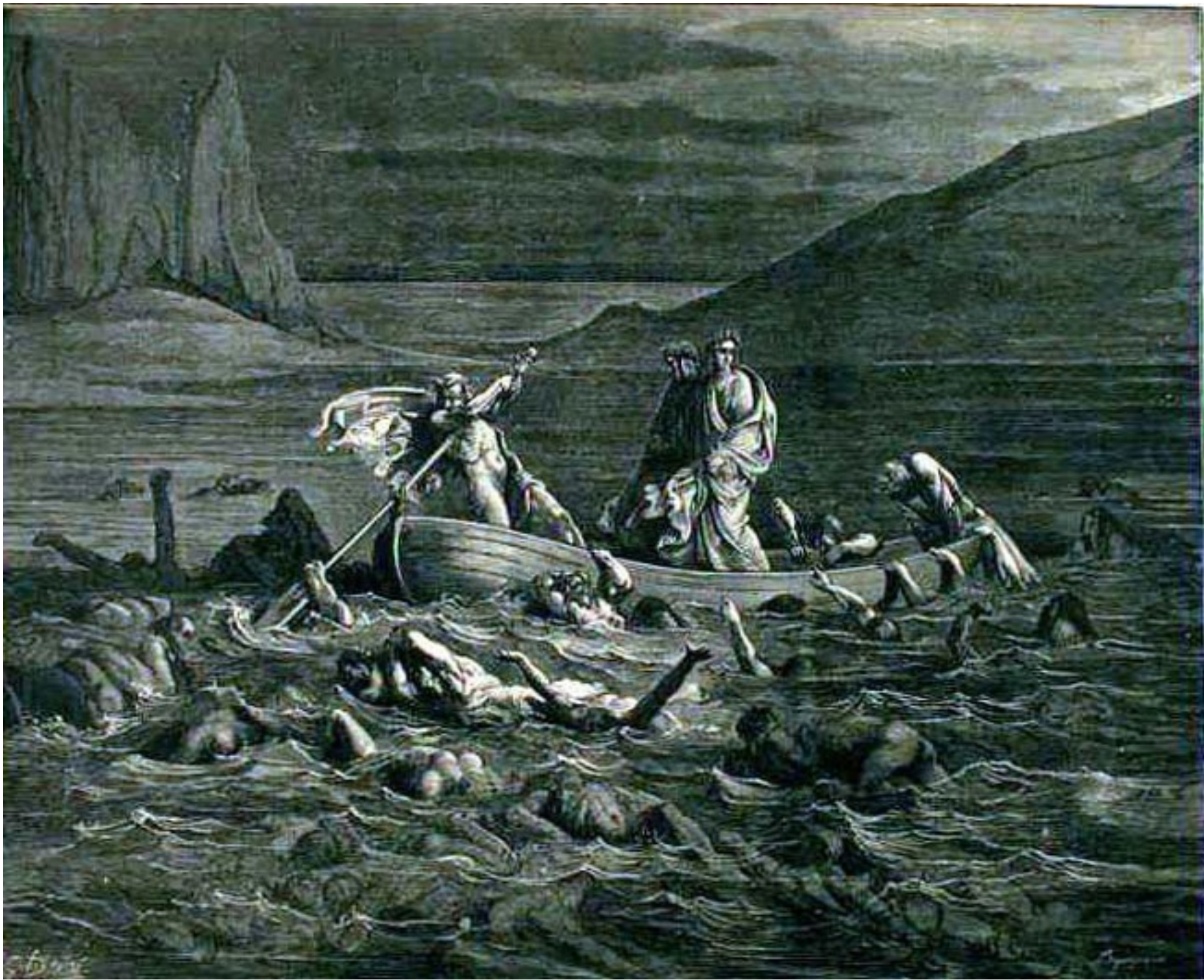
My kind master said "Look my son. See here the souls of those overcome by anger. And do not doubt it when I tell you that beneath the slime, there are spirits sighing. They are breathing bubbles unto the surface all around us. See it. Believe your eyes. Caught by the mire they say "We were sullen where the sweet air is gladdened by the Sun. We carried within us a gloomy smog, now we lie bitter in this black morass." This is the hymn they gurgle in their throats because they cannot speak whole words clearly.

So in a wide ark round the filthy bog between the mud and the bank we walked on. Our eyes fixed on those gulping down the filth.

Finally we reached the foot of a high tower.



Canto VIII



Now, long before we reached the tower's base, our eyes had been attracted to its peak by two small flames that suddenly appeared, so far off to be nearly visible, a response was signalled by another.

I turned to my sea of human knowledge "What is this signal and the other flame, what does it answer? Do respondeth." He said to me "Across the filthy swale you might already see what is summoned, if the marsh mist did not obscure the view." No bow string ever released an arrow to cut through the air faster than the boat I saw skimming away the waves that instant. A little bark with a single helmsman who howled "Arrive you now you wretched soul". "Phlegyas, Phlegyas" said my guide "This time you shout in vain . You shall not have longer than the passage across this mire". And just like one who hears of some great fraud practiced on him and resents it, Phlegyas frustrated began to seave with anger. My guide stepped into the boat, once aboard he had me follow, until I was in, it had not seemed to carry any load, but no sooner were we in the boat, then the ancient prow took off cutting the ooze more deeply now than it had ever done.



And as we steered through this stagnant channel, a figure appeared, caked in muck, crying “Who are you coming here before your time?”. “I have come” I replied “but not to stay, who are you covered in this foul slime here?” He said “As you see, just one who weeps”. “So remain and weep!” I tell him “Damned soul! I know you. You have been camouflaged by filth.” Then he reached with both hands towards the boat. But my master promptly pushed him off, shouting “Away with you and join the other dogs”. And then he threw both arms around my neck and kissed my face saying “Disdainful soul, blessed is the womb you were carried in, this man’s life in the world was full of pride and nothing good adorns his memory. So here his shade is consumed by anger. How many above count themselves great kings who will wallow here like swine in slurry leaving behind their cursed and hated names.”

“Master,” I said then “ it would make me glad to see him dunked beneath this filthy slime before we make our way across the lake.” And he replied, “Before the other bank comes into view, you will be satisfied, its right that such a wish should be enjoyed.”

And shortly after, I saw the sinners of the marsh, so many, mutilate him, that I thank and praise God still for it.

“Go for Filippo Argenti!...heee” they screamed. At this the Florentine maddened spirit turned to tearing itself with its own teeth. We left him there. I will say no more of him.

Now such a noise of wailing beats at me, I strain my eyes to see what lies ahead. My gentle guide said the city named Dis comes near with its throngs of bitter spirits. “I can make out mosques already” I said “in the valley quite clearly glowing red, just like they have been pulled out of fire”

And he told me “It is eternal fire that gives them the ruddy color that you see burning from this lower level of hell.”

At last we entered the deep entrenchment that forms the mote encircling the city. It seemed the walls were made of solid iron.

Only when we had circled quite far around, did we reach the spot where the helmsman cried “Out, out, the entrance for you is here”

Above the gate I saw a multitude, thousands or more of those fiendish angels who fell like rain from paradise. Enraged they screamed “Who is he that is still alive, dares pass through the kingdom of the dead?”

My wise guide then made a signal showing that he would have a word secretly with them. Only a little mollified they said “Come alone. But him who rashly entered our domain, send him on his foolish way back home or let him try. You, his escort across this shadowed land, you are to stay.”

Imagine reader, how dismayed I felt, at this sound of their hellish words. I thought that I should never return to their world.

“O my dear guide, who more than seven times restored my confidence and rescued me from the dangers that face me on my path, do not leave me now, please” I said imploring, “if our route is barred, then lets go back, we two together, and immediately.”

But the guide who brought me there then replied “Don’t be afraid. No one can take away our right to pass, given who granted it. But wait here for me, feed your tired spirit with good hope and be comforted. Don't think I would desert you in the underworld”. Then he walked away, a gentle Father, leaving me behind perplexed and doubtful, with yes and no, battling inside my head. What he proposed to them I could not hear, but he had not been standing with them long before they rushed back into their city. Then our enemies closed their heavy gates in my Lord’s face.

He was left standing there, then came back to me with reluctant steps. His eyes were on the ground or confidence was missing from his face. He sighed and said “They dare deny me the house of sorrow. But you are not to be worried, despite my anger, I shall win the contest whoever tries to hinder us. This insolence is nothing new, they used it once before at an outer gate, one not fastened since. You saw words of death written over it. Even now, already

within that gate one descends the slope crossing the circles
who alone will open this city to us.”



Canto IX



The hue which cowardice painted on my face, when I saw my guide returning to me, made him quickly mask his own strange pallor. He stopped, alert, intent like a listener since his eyes could not penetrate through the blackened air of folded sheets of mist. "Surely we must win this contest" He said "otherwise... we were offered such help, how slow this seems to be in coming."

I noticed how he covered his first words by the words with which he finished speaking. So different from what he had first uttered. Nonetheless his speech still made me afraid. Perhaps I took his broken phrase to mean something worse than he intended. "Has anyone come from that first circle where the sole punishment is hope denied, to descent so deep as this sad hollow?" I asked "It is rare one of us travels by the path I take". He replied "Although it is true that I came here once before, the cruel witch Erictho who could call on spirits to repossess their corpses summoned me soon after I left my flesh. She sent me through that wall, and down as far as Judas is circled to bring out a soul. That is the deepest place and the darkest, the farthest from the all surrounding sky, so rest assured I know the way they will. This swamp that exudes such a fetid stench lies all around the city of sorrow, which we cannot enter now without force."

He spoke further, but of what I forget because my eyes drew all my attention to the high tower, and its glowing peak where I saw three furies spring up as one, flecked with blood, with female limbs and bodies, snakes of vivid green were coiled all around them and a nest of horn

wipers formed their hair, ribboned and braided with tiny serpents.

Knowing these as handmaids to the queen of endless misery, he said to me “Look the fierce furies, Megaera to the left, Alecto weeps on the right, Tisiphone in the middle” He spoke as each raked fingernails across her breast, beat herself with her palms, and shrieked, so shrill that I plunged to the poet out of terror.

“Let Medusa come, we shall make him stone.” They howled glaring down “Our revenge against Theseus’s assault was feeble. “Turn around and keep your eyes shut tight.” My master said. “If the Gorgon appears and you catch sight of her, the world above will be lost to you”. Turning me himself he covered up my eyes with his own hands and now across the sluggish swell there came a sound of a tumult charged with terror that set the shores on either side trembling. A roar like a violent storm of wind, whipped up when warm air clashes through the cold and rages through the forest without cease, that rips and strips and breaks, bearing away, sweeping on dust, superb in power, and routing wild beast and shepherd alike. Uncovering my eyes he said to me “Now turn towards the ancient scum and look where the mist is thickest and most acrid”

As frogs before their enemy, the snake, scatter below the water diving down until each one squats safe on the bottom, so did the thousands of souls I saw fly before a figure who crossed the Styx with feet as dry as if he walked

on land. From time to time his left hand fanned his face, wearily pushing off the putrid air. Clearly he was sent with Heaven's message.

I turned to my master who made a sign that I should remain silent and bow down. How full of scorn that presence seemed to me. He reached the gate and touched it with a wand, it opened without hindrance from within.

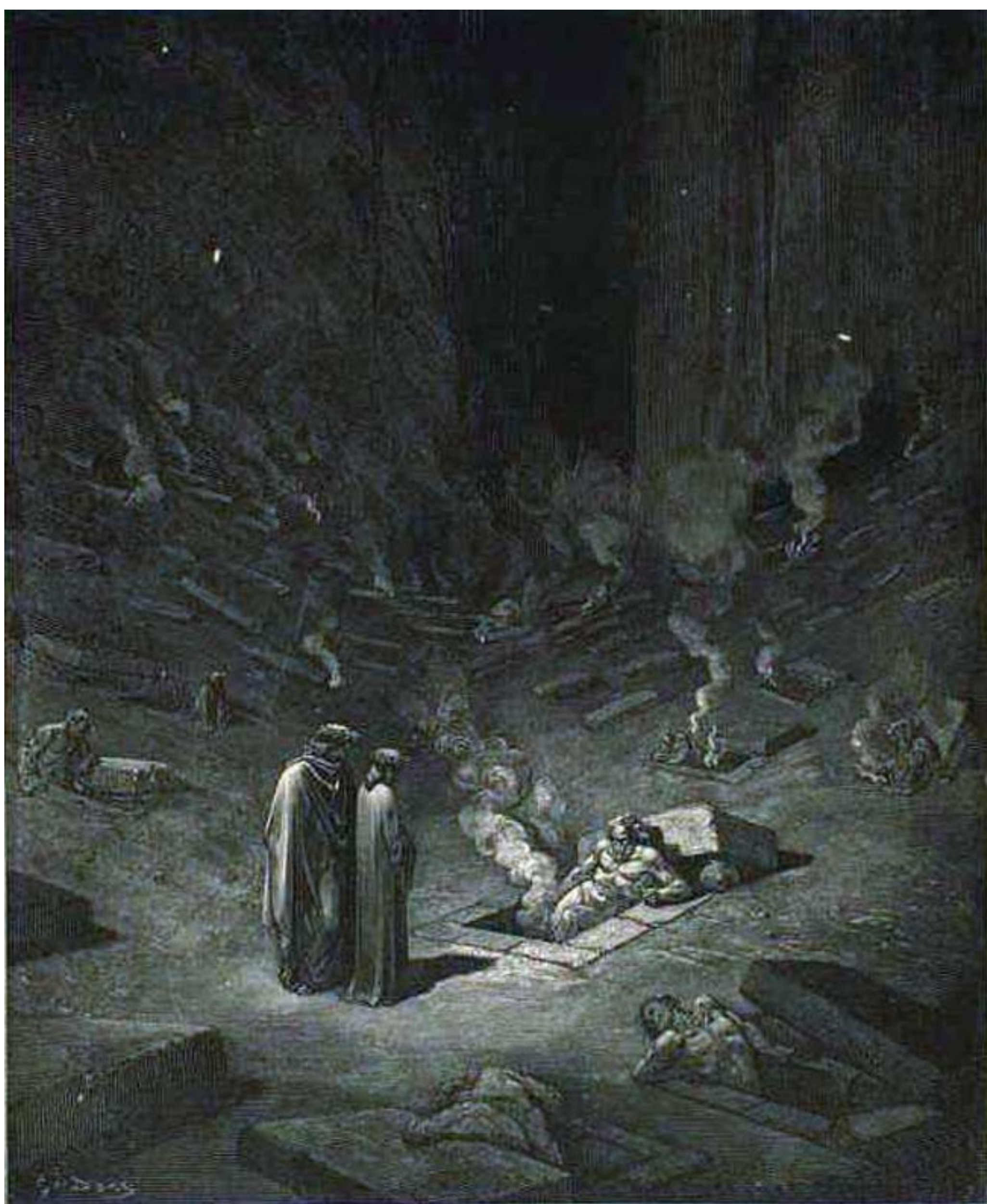
“Heaven's outcasts, hated crowd, what sustains this insolence you harbour? Why do you stubbornly resist that will which cannot be denied and time and time again has added to your suffering? What is the point in struggling against fate? If you remember well, your Cerberus still bears a hairless chin and throat for that.” Then he returned along the filthy path without a word to us, bearing the look of one spurred on and pressed by cares concerning the souls around him.



So we moved on then to the city in the safety lent by his holy words and made our way inside unresisted. I, anxious to observe the things that such a fortress holds within its walls glanced around as soon as I was inside and so on every side of spreading plane, of searing anguish and bitter torment.

Just as at Arles where the Rhone becomes stagnant or Pola near the Quarnaro gulf , that closes Italy and bathes its borders, where sepulchres make the land uneven, they did so here, and in all directions, except now their purpose was far more cruel. Because scattered among the tombs were flames which made them glow with a heat far greater than a smith would need to work his iron. The lid of each tomb was pushed to one side and rising from within came cries of grief as one in tortured agony would make.

I asked “Who are these people buried here in their stone coffers who reveal themselves by such tormented sighing.” And he said “The arch heretics and their followers of every sect. These tombs hold many more than you might imagine. Like heretics are interred with like. And the monuments are roasted more or less accordingly. Then he turned after the right, and we went on passing between the torments and the walls.



Canto X



Onward down the narrow pathway between the suffering and the cities ramparts, my master leads with me behind. I asked “Paragon of virtue, you, who lead me as you know best through these evil spirals, speak to me, satisfy my need to know. Might they be seen, the people lying in those tombs?”

“The lids are already raised and no one is guarding them.” He replied. “They will all be locked up when they return from Jehoshaphat and bring back the flesh that they left behind in the world above. This plot is reserved for Epicurus and his followers, all those who believe that the soul dies when the body gives up life. So the question you put to me just now will be answered here while we are here. And that question you have avoided asking.” I said “Master I hide what’s in my heart only to cut my chatter as you have urged.”

“O Tuscan, crossing this flaming city alive and so elegantly spoken. Be so kind just to pause here for a while. Your accent reveals you as a native of that noble city which I treated harshly in my time, perhaps too harshly.”

This sound burst from a tomb so suddenly I drew closer to my master in fear. “Turn around” He said “What are you doing? That’s Farinata, listen to his feat, look, you can see him there, from the waist up.” But my eyes were already fixed on his as he puffed out his chest lifting his chin at hell as if displaying supreme scorn. My guide promptly pushed me between the tomb towards him saying “Choose your words with care.”

When I was turning by his sepulchres, he eyed me for a while, then haughtily demanded “Tell me, who were your ancestors”. Glad to oblige, I hid nothing from him. But opened up and told him everything. His eyebrows rose a little and then he said “They were furious enemies of mine, my people and my friends. I scattered them on two occasions.”

“If they were expelled,” I answered him, “they still returned each time from all sides, an art yours never mastered.”

Another shade then emerged beside him, only visible as far as his chin, for he had I think risen to his knees. He peered around me, as if expecting that someone else had come along with me. And when he realised he hoped in vain, he said through tears “If your great intellect lets you travel here through this blind prison then, where is my son? Why not here with you?”

“I have not come here through my own powers.” I replied. “The one waiting there guides me. Perhaps to the one who was scorned by your Guido.” His words and the style of his punishment meant his name was already known to me and hence I could give him such a full reply. “Was scorned, you say?” he cried rising to his feet, “Is he no longer amongst the living? The sweet light of day does not strike his eyes?” When he noticed how I hesitated before I gave an answer he fell back into his tomb and was not seen again.

The stately shade at whose request I stopped, remained unconcerned. He did not turn his head or lean to see what happened. But took up where we left off speaking. He carried on. “If they were slow at mastering their art that tortures me far more than this bed does. But the face of she who rules these realms here shall brighten less than fifty times before you learn what an art it is to master. “Now since I hope your seed find peace someday, loose this knot that keeps my reason tangled.” I asked him then “As I understand it, you know the future before it happens, but knowledge of the present is denied.”

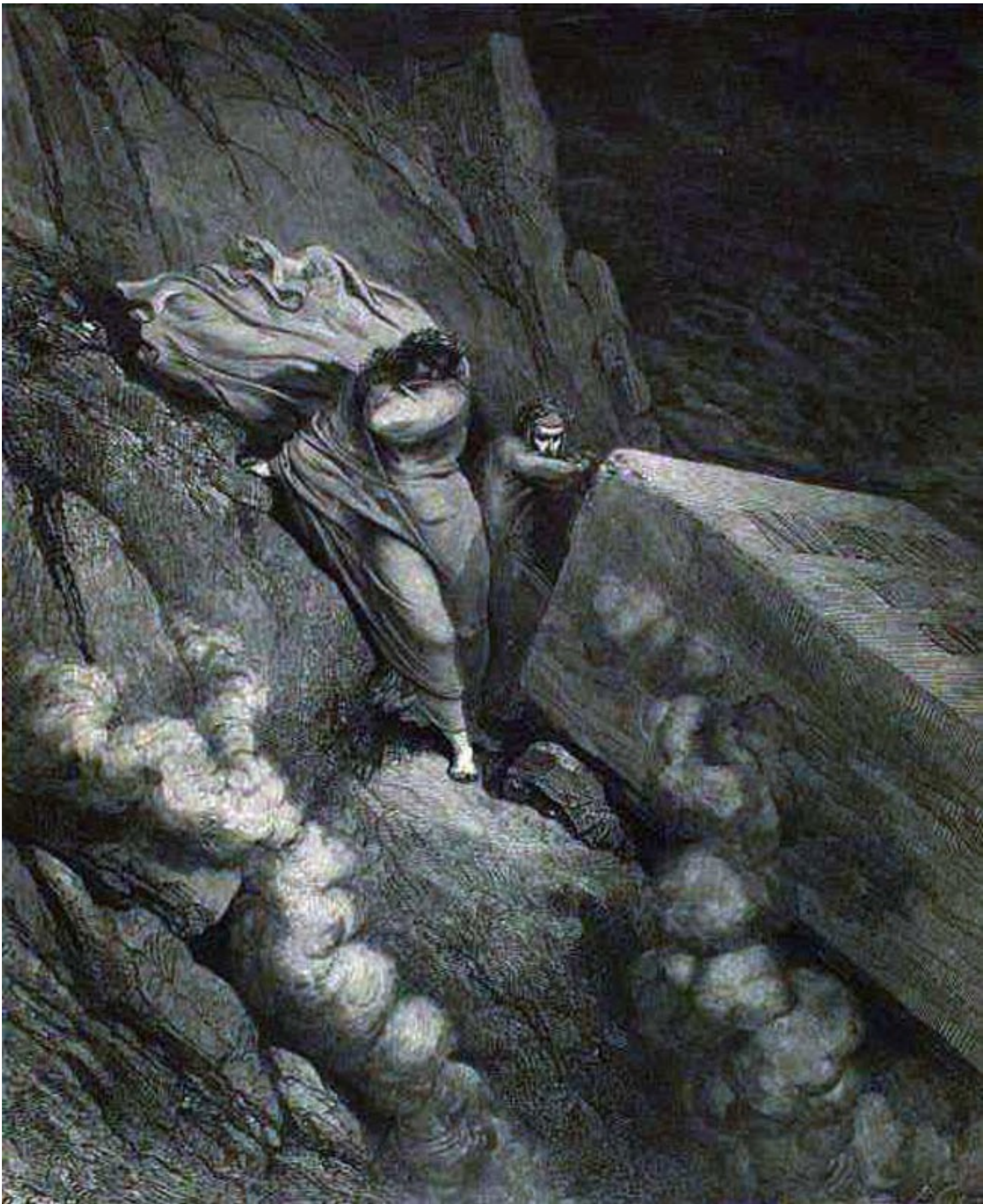
“We see like the far sighted see.” He said “Only events in the distance are clear, for God’s light illuminates these for us. When things draw near and as they happen our minds are blank. We would not know you lived if others had not brought us word of it. So when the doors of future time shut tight, the self awareness we do have will fail.”

Then regretting what I had done I said “Would you please tell the one fallen back down that his son is still among the living, if I were slow replying to him, let him know it was because in my mind I struggled with a point you just answered.”

By now my master was recalling me. So I quickly asked the shade to tell me the names of those who shared the tomb with him. He said “More than a thousand lie with me. Frederick the second and the cardinal are among them. The rest I will not name.” With that his figure disappeared below.

Pondering the menace in what he said I walked back then to the ancient poet, he moved ahead and as we went along he said to me “Why are you so dismayed?” I told him all the thoughts that filled my mind. “Remember what you heard against you here and note well.” He wisely commanded me lifting his finger. “When you stand before the glow of her whose eyes see everything you shall understand your life’s quest through her.” Following that he turned and left the wall going down the path towards the valley whose disgusting stench rose up to meet us.

Canto XI



High up on a steep bank's curving rim, formed by great shattered rocks set in a ring, we came upon a still more dreadful place. Because of the foul overflow of stink vomited from the depths of the abyss, we retreated behind the massive lid of a tomb upon which I saw inscribed these words "I hold pope Anastasius whom Photinus lured from the rightful road."

"We must delay our descent a little until our senses have become more used to this foul air. Then we can ignore it." My master said to me.

I answered him "Let us find some means so that we do not waste time. "

"I have thought of that" He said and then began "Within this circle of broken boulders there are three smaller circles like this one and all of them packed full with damned spirits. So just the sight of them will be enough, listen some now to why and how they are prisoned. All malice has in justice its end, which by fraud or force hurt someone else. Now fraud is a vice of mankind alone, displeases God the more. The fraudulent are placed lower to suffer greater pain. All the first circle is for the violent but since violence may have three targets it is constructed in three different zones. Violence to God, or to oneself, or to one's neighbours, both them and their goods. I shall explain. A man may kill or wound his neighbour. His property may suffer violence by fire, destruction or threat.

So the homicidal are tormented in the first ring are treated with malicious wounders, vandals, and those who destroy or plunder, divided into their various groups. Man can lay a violent hand on himself or on his goods. So in the second zone, repenting uselessly, are those who would rob your world of themselves, or by gambling, frittered away all their patrimony, or when they should be rejoicing, despair. There is violence against the deity, denying him at heart, cursing him, abusing nature and nature's bounty. So the smallest zone stamps with its seal the mark of sodomy and usury and those who insult God cursing him in their hearts. Fraud which gnaws away at every conscience is practiced against another by one who is trusted or one who has no trust. The latter form would only seem to break the bond of love which nature generates. Nestling in the second circle therefore are hypocrites, flatterers, magicians, counterfeiters, robbers, panders and cheats, simoners, seducers, and all such filth. In the former type of fraud, not only is the love granted by nature is dismissed, but the love which creates a special bond. So in the smallest of all the circles, at the pivot point of the universe, the throne of Dis, the traitor is consumed."

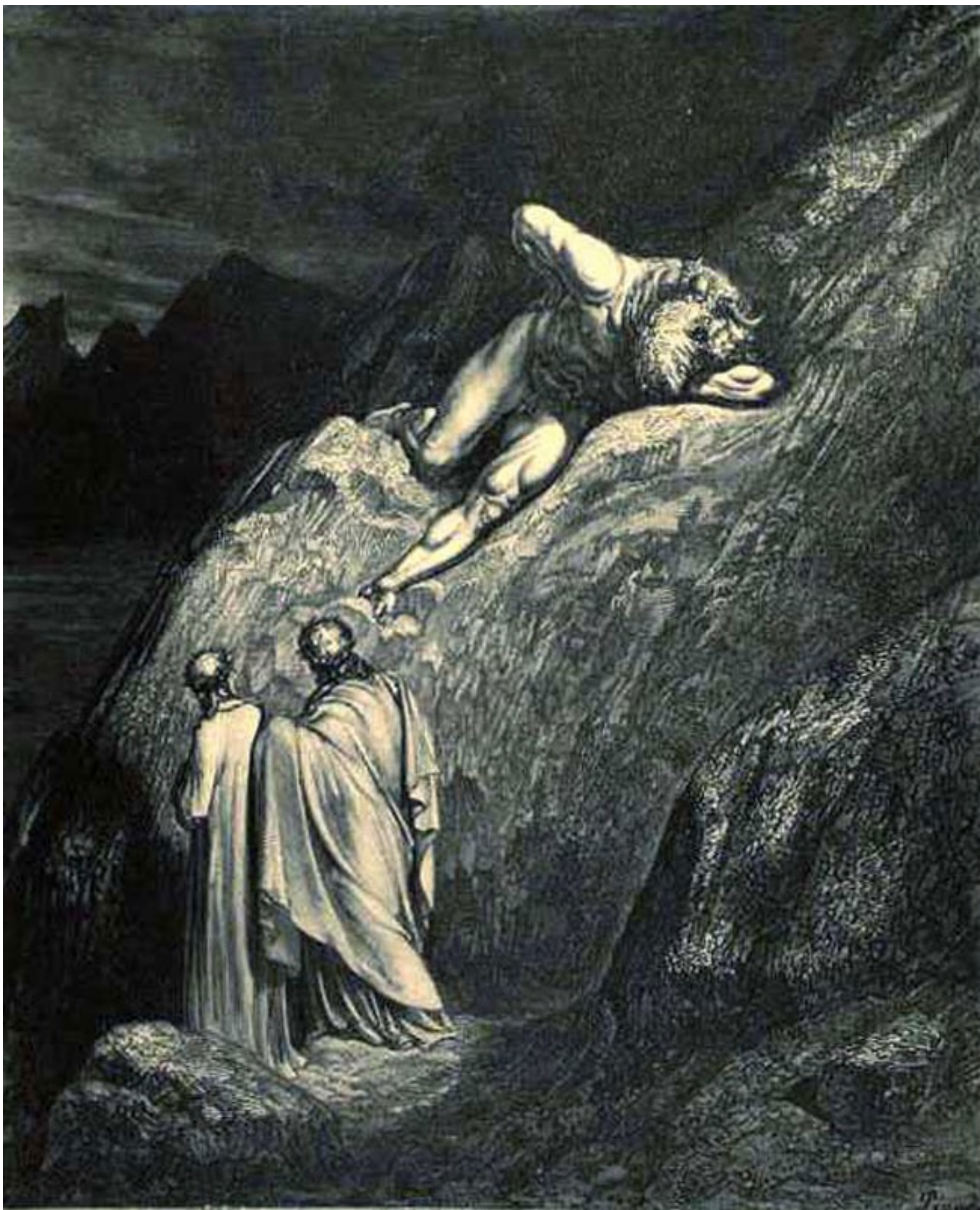
"Master, your explanation is most clear, making plain the nature of this abyss and its inhabitants" I said "Tell me, the spirits held by the loathsome marsh, those swept up by the blast or thrashed by the rain, those who clash and curse and clash together, why are they not punished in this city of flaming red, if God is angry with them. If it is not, then why do they suffer?"

He said to me “Do you not recall those sentences where Aristotle’s ethics is so sure? The three states are so repugnant to Heaven, incontinence, and malice and insane bestiality and how incontinence is less offensive to God, earns less blame. Now think about this judgement and recall those who suffer outside the city walls. Then you will see why they have been set apart from these malicious shades and why the wrath of Divine vengeance beats them more lightly?”

“O Sun, healer of every troubled spirit, your explanation gives me so much joy, to question pleases as much as knowing. But go back a little” I said to him “to where you say usury as a sin against God’s goodness, unravel that knot.”

“Philosophy to those that understand,” He said “points out and more than once, how nature as it takes its course follows the Divine intelligence and its art. And if you search Aristotle’s physics early on in its pages, you will find your art when it can, would follow nature just like a pupil at his master’s heels. Your art then is God’s grandchild so to speak. From these two, art and nature, man must grow if you recall how Genesis begins. Because the usurer holds another way, rejecting both nature and her student art, he invests his hope in something else. Now follow me, we should be moving on. Pisces on horizon gleams and dances and the plough is riding over the North west wind. Ahead we may climb down the precipice.”

Canto XII



The spot we had reached to descend the bank, was alpine steep. Reclining upon it was something quite appalling to the eyes. Just like the landslide that battered the bank of Adige caused by either earthquake or erosion, which sent down rocks cascading from the peak of the mountain where it began to shatter all the plane, in such a way that it makes a pathway down, so was the passage down to that ravine.

And at the edge of the shattered chasm lay stretched full length the infamy of Crete. The beast who was conceived in a false cow. Catching sight of us he gnawed at his flesh like one convulsed by inner fury. My guide cried to it “Perhaps you worry you are seeing the Duke of Athens again, the one who came above to butcher you. Keep away monster, this man does not come instructed by your sister. All he wants to do here is observe your punishments.”

And like a bull that breaks loose the moment it receives the fatal blow twists and turns but cannot charge, I saw the Minotaur respond.

My ever weary guide shouted “Head for the pass while he still is berserk.”

So down we scrambled on the stones which often moved and slipped beneath my feet with a pressure of their strange new burden. I was deep in thought as I clamoured down until he said “You are thinking may be about this ruined waste here, watched over by that beast whose fury I just subdued. Now let me tell you, when I came before, this

far down in the lower depths of hell, the rocky mess had not yet fallen down. However if I remember it right, shortly before he came, who carried off from Dis the great spoil of the first circle, the deep foul pit so trembled everywhere I thought the universe was touched by love, by which, according to one theory the world is often resolved into chaos. That was the moment when the ancient rock toppled here, and in other places too, but look down the valley for we are near the stream of blood which simmers its sinners who injured others through their violence.”

O blind cupidity, an insane wroth! Which so goads us on in such a brief life, then forever steeps us in misery.

I saw a broad ditch, went to a curve, with all the plain held in its wide embrace , just as my companion had described it. Between the ditch at the foot of the high bank, galloped centaurs in fire armed with arrows, as they had when they hunted in the world.



Observing us come down, they stood their ground, three stepped from their ranks, arrows erected. From that distance one cried “What punishment have you come down the slope to suffer here. Tell us from there. If not I draw my bow!”

My master replied “Our answer will be to Chiron beside you, not to you, being so headstrong as always as your curse”

He touched me then and said “That is Nessus who died for the lovely Dejanira on earth and made his blood the means of his revenge. In the middle, head bowed is great Chiron, the one who trained Achilles in his youth, the third is Pholus known for drunken wrath. The Centaurs run in thousands round the ditch, shooting souls who rise further from the blood from the level allotted by their sins.

We moved in closer to the agile beasts. Chiron took an arrow and with its notch combed back a beard to reveal his massive mouth saying to the others “Have you noticed how the one behind, moves what he touches? A dead man’s feet do not want to do that.”

My good guide already next to his chest, the place where his two natures merge, answered “He is indeed alive and so alone. I am here to guide him through the dismal pit. Necessity not pleasure brings him here. One came down from singing Hallelujah to assign this special office to me. He is no thief nor I a robber, but by that power which enables me to travel along such a savage road, lend us one

of your band to lead the way, to the ford and carry him on his back. He is no spirit that can go by air. “

Then Chiron turned to his right to Nessus and said “Go, and be their guide as they ask. If another group protests, chase them off.”

Safe with our new escort we moved along the margin of that serving crimson flood in which the tormented souls shrieked and boiled.

Immersed to the eyebrows the centaur spoke “These are the tyrants whose hands in life, clutched and plundered, dripped with bloody gore. Here they lament their bitterness misdeed. Here Alexander and Dionysius who caused such years of grief to Sicily. He with the black hair on his forehead is Azzolin. The other blond one is Obizzo of Esti, who was slain by his step son in the upper world.”

A little farther on, some people emerged enough to lift their throats above the boiling stream. Then I saw the spirits who held their hand heads and chests above the flow of the river. I knew the names of quite a number here. Gradually the blood became shallower, until it simmered at the feet alone. And here we found passage through the ditch.

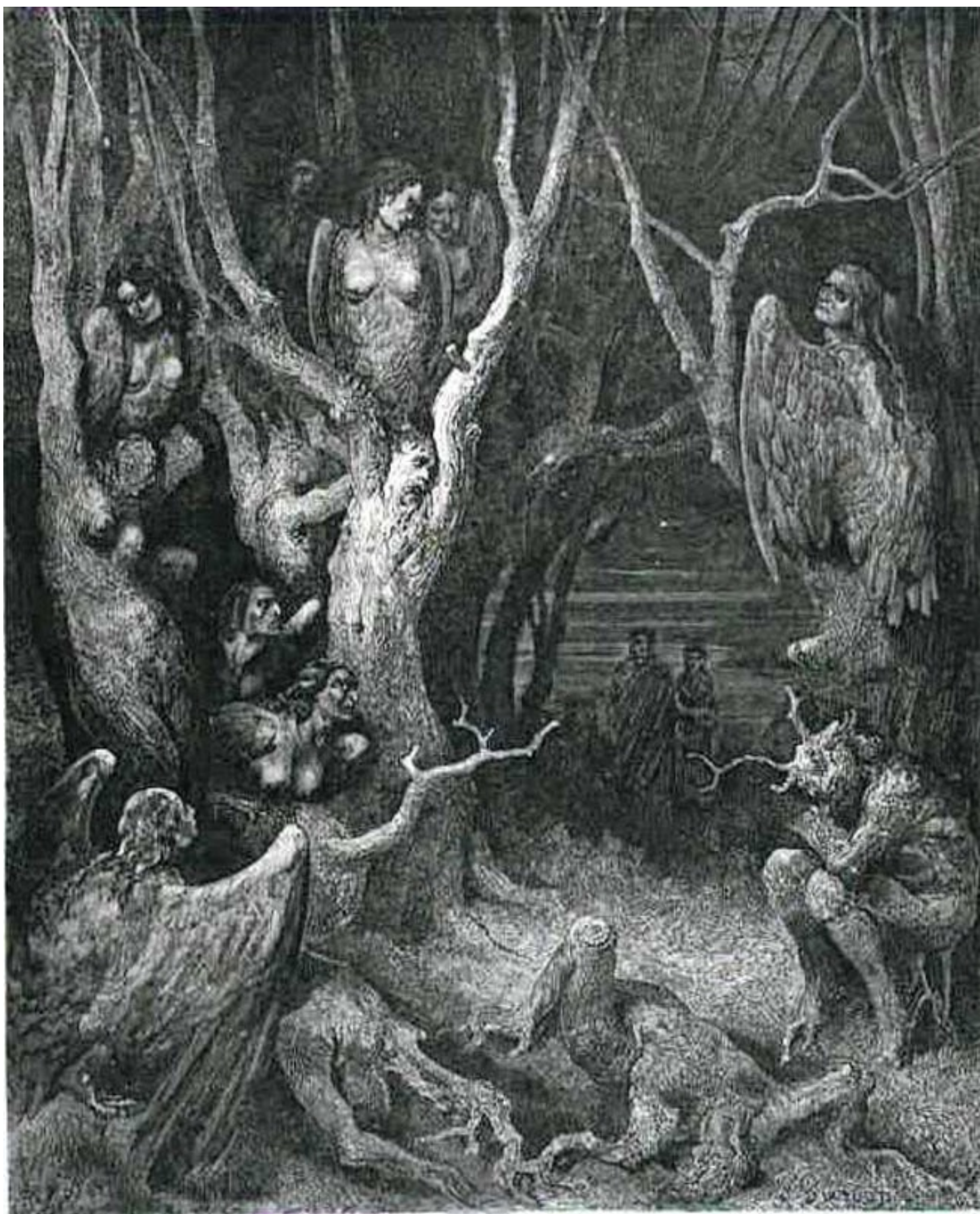
“Just as in this direction you see the boiling steam recede,” the centaur said “in the other the bottom sinks away deeper and still deeper till it comes once more to where the tyrants lament their fortune. There, divine justice

torments Attila, who was such a scourge upon the earth and Pyrrhus and Sextus. Through eternity it milks the tears loosened by the boiling from Rinier da Corneto and Rinier Pazzo turned the public roads to battle grounds.”

Then back he turned and so we crossed the ford.



Canto XIII



Nessus had not yet reached the other side before we plunged into a dense forest. No path traced it. The leaves there were not green but black. The branches were twisted and knotted, and bore no fruit but had thorns and poison. Even though savage beasts had roamed between Cecina and Corneto, beasts that hate farm land will not haunt and scrub so dense and harsh.

The loathsome harpies construct their nests here who drove the trojans from Strophades their dismal cries for telling future trials. They have wide wings , human necks and faces , feet armed with claws, fat and feathered bellies, perching in the strange trees to shriek laments .

Here my good master began “You should know” He said “, you are within the second zone and shall be so until we reach the dreadful sand. Look carefully around you and see what you would not believe on my word alone.”

I heard wailing misery from all sides but could not see the souls making the noise. In bewilderment I stopped lost in thought. I fancy he believed that I was thinking that all these voices came from souls who lay concealed because of us among the stumps. But then my master said “If you break off some little branch from any of these trees, your thinking in that way will be cut short.” At this I stretched out my hand a little. And from the great thorn bush tore off a twig. Its trunk cried out. “Why are you tearing me?” Then after some dark hued blood seeped from it, it cried out again “Why do you rip me? Have you no feelings of pity at all? We were men once. Now we have become trees.

Your hand might have shown us more mercy had we been no more than the souls of snakes.”



Like a sapping log which burns at one end and looses hissing sap at the other , the stump blurted speech and blood together. I dropped it standing frozen there with fear.

The tree spoke “I was custodian of both the keys of Frederick's heart turning them so softy to open or close that I displaced almost all others from his confidence. I was most zealous in that splendid post even to the cost of

my sleep and strength. That whore who never turned her strumpet eyes from Caesar's household, the vice of all courts and their common ill inflamed everyone against me and then inflamed Augustus so my many honours became disgrace. In spiteful agitation, my spirit thought of dying to escape all scorn and may be unjust to my own self. By the roots of this peculiar tree I swear to you, that never once broke faith with my lord worthy of all honour. Should either of you return to the world, cherish my memory, which still lies low under the stroke that envy dealt to it. “

The poet listened, then to me “Now he is silent. Do not lose your chance, ask him questions if you want to know more.”

But I said “Question him again yourself on whatever you believe I should know. For I could not, such pity chokes my heart.”

So he began once more. “So that this man may do willingly what you ask him to, imprisoned soul and please tell us how a soul gets entangled in these knots and if you can, are any ever freed?”

The trunk wheezed heavily until its breath turned into a form of words “Briefly now when the violent spirit leaves its body and is torn itself from, Minos ordains will be sent down as far as the seventh round. It falls into the wood, at no set place but wherever fortune hurls it and there it germinates like any ear of corn growing from a sapling

into a tree. Then the harpies feeding upon its leaves cause it pain and provide a vent for pain. Like the rest, we shall fetch our empty skins but we will never put them on again. It is wrong to regain a thing foresworn. We shall trail our bodies here to be hung upon the trees this most dismal wood , each on the thorns of its tormented shade.”

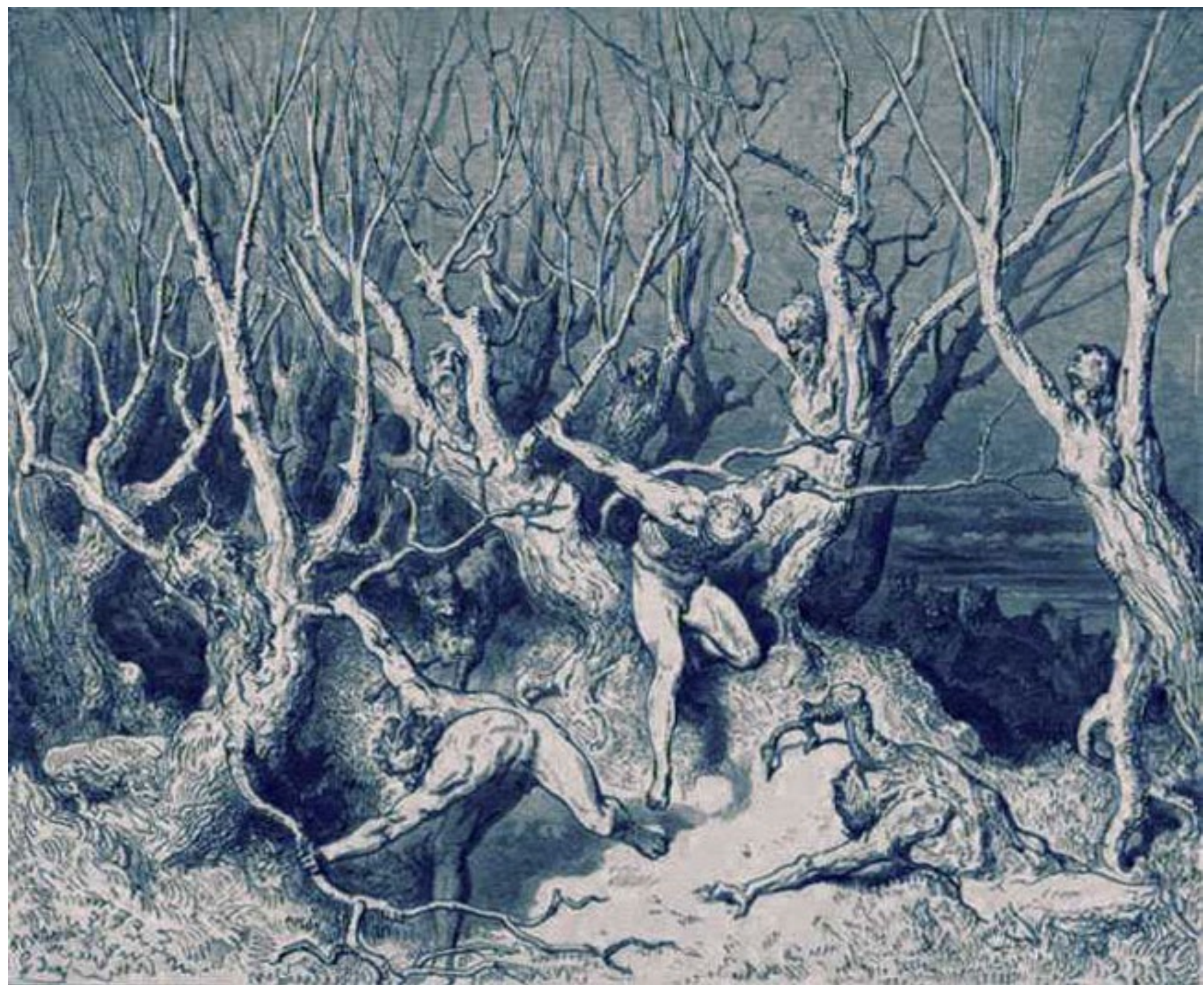
While we were still listening to the trunk thinking perhaps it wished to tell us more, we were startled by some sudden noises as the hunter hears when the wild boar hunt crashing to the undergrowth come near him and on our left we saw scratched and naked, running at furious speed two figures tearing through the tangles on the branches as the one in front cried, “Come quickly death!” the other slow fearing to be outrun, urged “Lana your legs are not so nimble to at Toppo’s joust! “

Then perhaps because his breath failed him he crashed into a bush. The wood behind them ran full of bitch hounds black and keen and swift as any greyhound slipped off the leash, they sank their teeth in him who crouched there tearing at him piece by piece and carried off his miserable limbs.

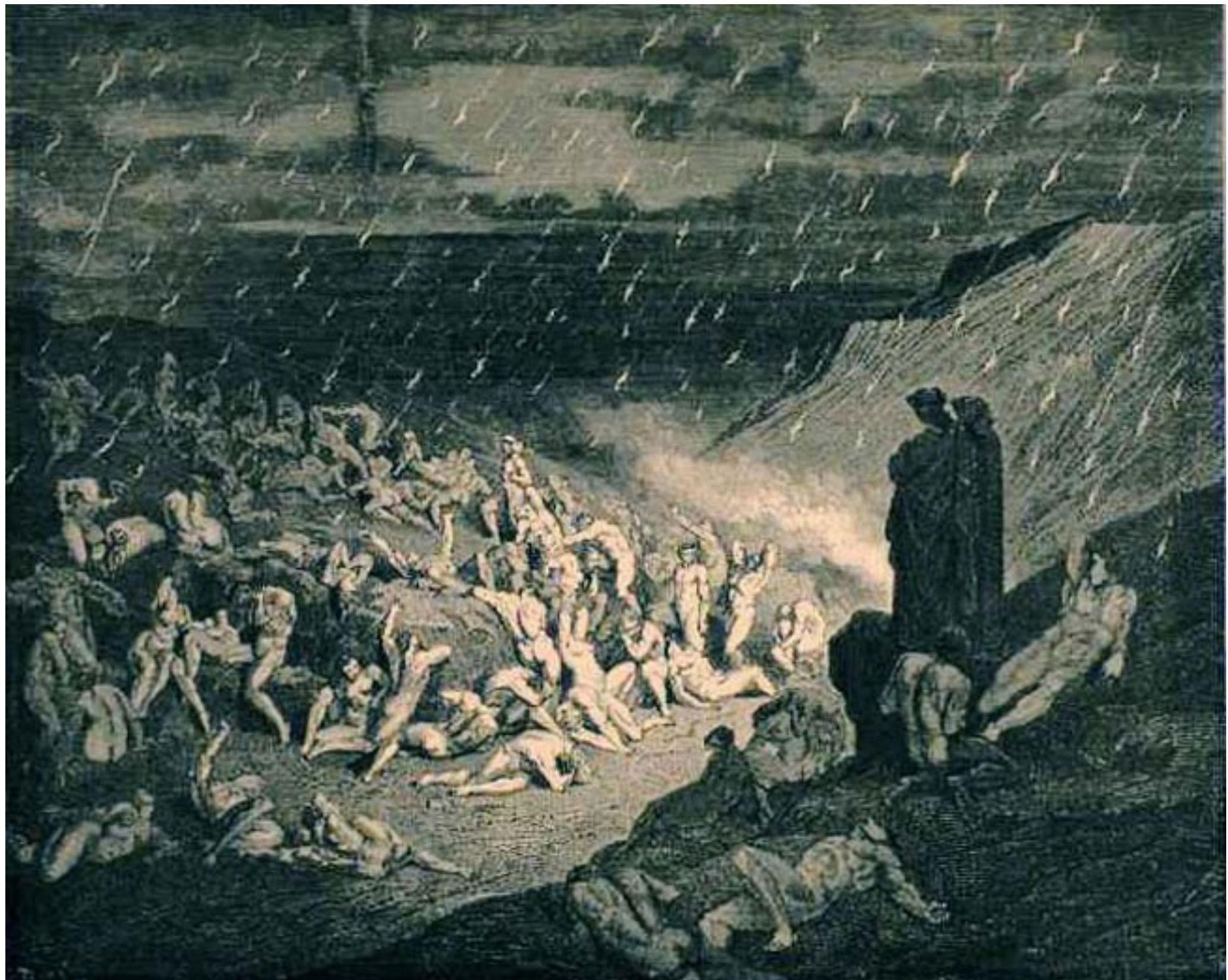
My guide led me to the bush, by the hand, weeping vainly through all its bleeding wounds. “O Jacopo, of Saint Andrea” He said “ What have you gained by making me your screen. How am I to blame for your evil life?”

“Who were you then who gasps from all these wounds such words of sorrow mingled with your blood?” and he

replied “O spirits who have come to look on this shameful mutilation which has rent away from me my many leaves, collect them at the foot of this sad bush. My home city was the one which exchanged John the Baptist, for its first protector, Mars, who swears he will ensure her misfortune and were it not, there still remains of him some vestiges on the bridge of Arno. Those citizens who rebuilt the place upon the ashes left by Attila would have laboured their work in vain. As for me I made my house my gallows.



Canto XIV



Love for my native city obliged me to gather up the strewn leaves and restore then to the voice which was already fading. From there we came upon the boundary separating the second and third zone to see God's justice in dreadful action.

To make these new things clear I should explain we had arrived at a wide plain whose bed rejected all plant life. All around it the dismal wood surrounds it like a reef, in turn encircled by the stream of blood. Right on the verge we

checked our steps. The space was an expanse of deep dry sand not unlike that once trod by Cato's feet. God's vengeance how afraid you ought to be everyone who reads what I saw there. Troop upon troop of naked souls I saw wailing, deeply wretched. Each troop subject to it seemed its own special penalty. For some lay stretched out supine on the ground, some sat huddled crouching, others wandered incessantly back and forth, roaming souls were the most numerous and those laid out to suffer with the least, although that pain was greater and they uttered louder cries. Roaring drifting flakes of fire fell slowly down just as the snow descends on windless Alps or those falling flames Alexander saw crossing the torrid lands of India dropped and broken on his army in the ground. Where he ordered that his army's legion should stamp upon the soil because the fire was best extinguished while in single flakes. So the heat fell here uninterrupted. Where by the sand like tinder under steal was set on fire, inflicting twice the pain.

Not for one moment paused the frantic dance of miserable hands, now here now there beating out flames of newly fallen fire. I began then "Master, whom nothing dares resist, except the devils who rushed out and opposed us at the entrance gate, who is that great spirit who does not heed the fire lying disdainful over there as though he never ripened in the rain?"

That very one observing that I put a question to my guide concerning him cried, "What I was alive, that I am now dead."

Then my leader spoke with more energy than I had ever heard before “O Capaneus, your suffering is greater because your pride is still unextinguished. No torment short of your own rage would be a pain sufficient to equal your wrath.”

Then turning to me explained more gently saying “He was among the seven kings who beseeched thieves, he seems as before to mock God and hold him in great disdain, as I said to him, his spiteful words will make the decorations on his chest. Now follow on behind me taking care not to put your feet on the burning sand but keep in tight by the edge of the trees.”

We carried on without a word to where a narrow stream comes gushing from the woods. Even now thinking of its reddish tinge I shudder, just like the Bulicame spring from which the stream shared by the prostitutes flows across the sand this rivulet flowed its bed and both the banks were made of stone. And I saw that our passage lay by there.

“In all I have shown you since we entered that gate to which no body is denied your eyes have seen nothing as important as this stream, quenching all the flames above it.” So said my guide to me. I asked him then to satisfy the appetite that he wet.

He went on “In the middle of the sea lies a waste land that bears the name of Crete under whose king the world was once pure, there is a mountain named Aida once blessed with leafy streams now all dry and withered. Within that

mountain stands an ancient man, massive, erect, back towards Damietta facing Rome as though it were his mirror. His head is made of finest gold, his arms and breast are pure silver. From there is brass down to where his body forks, after that choice iron except the right foot of baked clay on which he puts more weight than the other. A crack runs through each part except the gold, a fissure from which dripping tears collect to his feet and erode away the rock. They take their course sliding from stone to stone forming Acheron, Styx and Phlegethon, then through this narrow stream descending to the spot where nothing further sinks they form Cocytus. What that pool may be you shall see. So I will not speak of it here.

I said “If this rivulet starts above in our world why does it only show now?”

And he “You know the place is circular although you have descended this far down circling left you have not done a circuit, so if some novel site appears to us it should not paint surprise upon your face.”

“And what about Lethe and Phlegethon” I asked then. “You ignore the former one and say the other is formed by these tears. You questions please me all of them.” He said “But the boiling red stream should solve that one. Lethe you will see but outside this abyss, there where the spirits go to bathe themselves when their repented sin has been removed.”

He added “Now it is time to quit the wood. Follow close , these margins stay unburnt offering us a pathway, above them all the flaming vapours extinguish.”

Canto XV



One of these hard margins now leads us on, as a cloud of steam hangs over the brook protecting the banks and stream from fire. Just as between Bruges and Vicente, Flemings fearing the flood that burst upon them build their great dikes and banks to repulse the sea, and like the Paduans along the Brenta, in order to protect their towns and forts against the melting snows of Chiarentana, so these were made thought not as high or broad by whoever had engineered them.

We were already so far from the wood, that had I dared to turn and look behind, I could have seen no trace of it at all, when a company of spirits appeared, coming along the banks staring at us, just as in the twilight beneath the new moon men peer to identify each other. They squinted at us, knitting their eyebrows like some old tailor at the needle's eye. I was looked at this way by the strange souls, till one recognised me and grabbed my sleeve crying "This is marvellous". As he reached I searched beneath his roasted face to see if his burns would not exclude my mind's recollection of him. I leaned my face towards his and answered, "Ser Brunetto, you? In this place?" He replied "O my son, don't object to if Brunetto Latini lets his band continue on and turns back to stay with you a while."

I said to him "I beg you to, if you wish me to sit with you, I shall if my guide permits it". "Run" he said "If we stop for a moment then we must lie flat for a hundred years forbidden to brush off the flakes of fire, so keep moving, I will stay at your heels and catch up with my company later wailing their never ending punishment."

I dared not step down from my path to go level with him, but held my head bowed down, like someone pacing in reflective thought.

"What chance or destiny" he began "brings you down here before your days are up and who is this that guides you on the road?"

“In the brighter life above” I replied “I found myself in a valley quite lost before my time had fully run its course. Yesterday at dawn I turned back from it and as I was returning he arrived to lead me back home along this path.”

He said to me “If you follow your star you cannot fail to reach that glorious spot if I judge rightly when my life was fair. Had it not been that I died so early I would have tried to help you in your work saying that Heaven is so kind to you. But then am grateful, a malignant crowd who came from Fesole years ago and still have rocks and mountains in their blood will become enemies for your good deeds.”

“Had all my prayers been granted,” I answered “ you would not be yet banished from humanity, for etched in my mind and how my heart is saddened with it now, is your image, loving and fatherly, when in the world aa by aa you taught me, how man may come to immortality. While I live, it is only just my words should speak the thanks that I owe to you. I will write what you say of my destiny, keep it with other words for the future, for there is a Lady should I reach her, who will understand and interpret them. This much at least let me make clear to you. As long as my conscience does not chide me, I am ready for fortune, come of may. It is not the first time I have been promised luck so let fortune keep her wheel spinning round and at the peasants still wield his shuffle.”

My master turned, looked back and remarked “Be careful, listener learns from what he hears.” But nonetheless I carry on talking by asking Sir Brunetto which members among his group were the most eminent.

He said to me “To know of some is good. Silence is more seemly of the others. Time is short and they are many. Briefly let me say they were all clerics or men of letters of reputation. All marked by the same sin of sodomy. Priscian proceeds with their company and Francis of Accorso. Had you craved for such lusty filth, you might have seen he who the servant of serpents had transferred from Arno to Bacchiglione where he left behind the body he abused. I would say more but I cannot walk further. Nor speak longer, for I see they are coming, a new plume of smoke rising from the sand and I may not mix with those that come now. I would recommend my Tesoro to you, I still live in that. I ask no more.”

Then turning back he ran like one of those who race across the open countryside to win the cloth of green in Verona and seemed more the winner than the loser.

Canto XVI

I had come to a place where murmurings of water tumbling down to the next round made a humming sound like bees around a hive. When starting out together, three shades ran straight towards us leading another group to the torment of the bitter downpour. They came towards us each crying aloud.

“Stop, please stop. From your clothes you seem to be from our wicked city of Florentine”. Oh what wounds did I see upon their limbs, recent scars and old brands seared by the flames. I still feel a pang when I think of them. My teacher heard their shouting and turned and said to me “Wait, these shades you should respect were it not for the fire that falls here. By the nature of the place I should say that you not they should do the hurrying.”

Then as we paused they resumed their wailing. And now nearing us formed a single wheel reaching out like ancient wrestlers oiled, stripped, alert to possible advantages or holds before risking a throw or swapping blows. And as they wheeled round, each twisted his face to look at me so that their necks and feet travelled in constant opposition. “If the misery of these shifting sands” began one “and our charred and scorched features make you despise us at our petition then let our great earthly fame induce you to tell us who you are and how you walk with still living feet and such assurance. He whose footsteps you see me following although now he goes naked and peeled bare was of a higher rank than you might think. He was grandson of the

good Gualdrada. His name was Guidoguerra. In his life his intellect was as potent as his sword. The other treading the sand next to me, is Tegghiaio Aldobrandi whose wise voice deserved more welcome in the world above and I stuck with them in torment here, I was Jacopo Rusticucci. Truly, more than anything my downfall was my wife.”

Had I been protected from the fire I should have leapt into their midst then and there and think my teacher would have suffered it but since I would have burnt and baked myself, fear overcame good will which made me long to enfold them in my arms.

I began “It was sorrow not contempt I felt in my soul of your condition, so profound, it will not leave me quickly. The moment my lord addressed me in words through which I gathered men like you might come. I am of your land and since I was young I have spoken of your great deeds and heard of your honourable names with much pride. I leave the gold behind, bound for sweet fruit that was promised by my truthful guide. But first I must descend to the centre.”

“May your soul remain to lead your body and may your fame multiply after you.” He replied to me “If you can tell us if courtesy and valour linger still within our city as they used to do or have they been banished altogether. For Guglielmo Borsier, who lately joined our band of sufferers provokes us greatly by that which he relates.

“Upstarts and their sudden riches” I cried chin raised
“have bred excess an arrogance in that city of Florence, for
which you weep already.” They took this as my answer
exchanging glances as men do when they hear the truth.

“If it’s some other time, all three replied, you make others
content so readily, hone happy you whose words come
with such ease. If you manage to leave these mirky and
returned to see the lovely stars again when you repeat with
pleasure, ‘there I was’ , speak of us to the people living
there.”

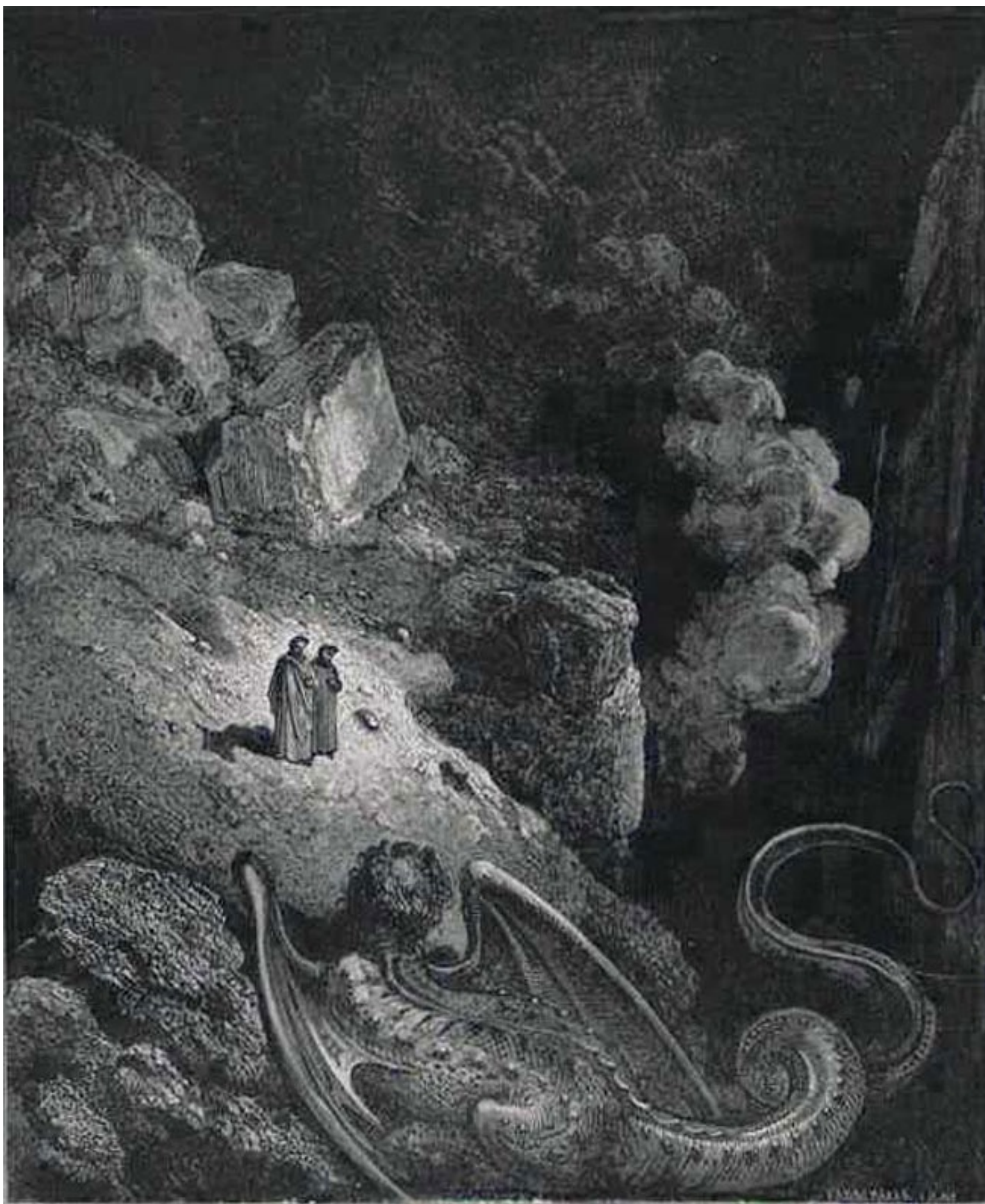
They broke their wheel then and ran off. Swift legs seemed
wings for flight. You could not say Amen before they
disappeared out of sight. And now my master thought it
time to go.

I followed him and we had not gone far when falling water
thundered close by so we hardly heard each other
speaking. I had a rope bound round my waist which I
thought at one time I might use to snare the leopard with
the brightly spotted skin. Unwinding this completely from
my waist according to my master’s instructions I passed it
to him gathered up in coils. He took it and turning to the
right cast it from the edge into the abyss. He spoke “Soon
what I expect will rise up and what your fancy dreams of
shall be seen.”

Though tempted, a man should close his lips upon a truth
which seems more like a lie, for then innocent of blame he
will have to take it. I shall not keep silence, O my reader, I

swear by the verses of my comedy, so they may receive enduring favour, through the thick and mirky air, I saw a figure come swimming up, startling to the strongest heart, like one returning who has dived down to set free an anchor, caught on some rocky ledge or snagged on weed, arms stretched upwards with feet drawn in and kicking.

CANTO XVII



“Look, the monster with its sharpened tail which passes over mountains, ramparts, and defences, look at him, the pestilence of the whole world.” My guide addressed these words to me and then beckoned to the beast to come ashore close to where the rocky path broke away. And on he came, that effigy of fraud landing with his head and chest on the edge but not drawing his tail upon the bank. His were the features of an honest man, outwardly benign, the rest was all snake. He had two clawed paws hairy to his armpits. On his back and belly and on both his sides were strange painted knots and curlicues. No Tartars or Turks ever wove a cloth showing colours more intricately done nor were such webs spun on Arachne’s loom.

As fishing boats will sometimes lie ashore part in the water, part in the firmer ground or in regions where drunken germans guzzle, the beaver gypsies take to take his prey, so that most loathsome beast lay at anchor on that stony rim that borders the sand.

Out in the void he twitched his tail about, tensing in a curve the poisonous fork that armed its tip just like a scorpion. My guide said “Now we must make a detour off our route to where that beast is lying.” Descending and keeping to the right hand we took ten paces toward the abyss to avoid the hot sand and falling flame.

We had reached the creature’s place, when I saw sitting on the sand a little way off, some spirits beside the yawning abyss at which my guide said “So you have complete experience of this ring, go to them. See the state they are

in. But keep your words brief. I will talk with him while you are gone so that he will lend us his strong shoulders.”

Thus yet again upon the very verge so alone on the seventh circle's rim I went to where that sad group was sitting.

Misery seemed to well up from their eyes, now here now there futile hands flapped pathetically, against the flames, against the scorching ground, as dogs in summer snap or scratch or gnaw maddened by biting a fleece or gadflies.

Although I looked at their faces closely roasting in the falling fire, I knew none, but noticed hanging around the neck of each a pouch of special colour and design, to which their eyes always greedily turned. Looking around me as I moved among them I saw on a purse of yellow, picked out the face and shape of an azure lion, then looking further I saw another blood red with a goose more white than butter. Then one who had a pregnant sow in blue stamped on a white wallet, said sharply to me “What are you doing in this pitch? Shove off! And since you are still alive here is news for you. This seat at my left hand here is reserved for Vitaliano when he gets here. I am a Paduan amongst Florentines and they often deafen me by bawling. Come on down this sovereign cavalier and bring the person blazoned with three goats.” Then twisting his mouth he stuck out his tongue in the way an ox might to lick its nose. And I afraid of a longer stay had vexed my master who had warned me to be brief. I made my way back from those weary souls. And found my guide already mounted up on the back of the monstrous animal. He said to me “Take courage, be strong. Our descent has to be

done this stairway. You go in the front, I will take the middle so the tail won't injure you."

I, shaking like one who feels a fever coming on, whose nails are pale already and trembles even at the glimpse of his shade, then felt shame stir me to courage like servants with a kind lord. I climbed the shoulders. "See you hold me tight." I wanted to say but found my voice speechless. But he who had helped me through other fears threw both his arms around me as I mounted and said "Now get on, glide down in gentle arcs, think of your strange burden."

As a little ship backs from its moorings easing away so the beast departed. When he felt himself hanging in the void he turned his tail to where his chest had been, then stretching it out moved it like an eel gathering the air to him with his paws.

To my mind the terror was no greater in Phaeton when he relaxed his reins and scorched the skies Heavens so show, nor when wretched Icarus realised the waxy feathers were melting off him and heard his father cry "What's your height?" than my fear when I saw air on all sides. Then everything faded but for the beast swimming slowly slowly wheeling downwards and I feeling the rising wind on my face.

Now on my right I heard the waterfall plunging with the dreadful roar far beneath. I thrust out my head to glance below. My terror grew as we fell. The sight of fires, the sound of agonised wails so shook me, trembling I huddled

up even tighter and then I saw what I missed until now.
Our gentle spiral down to torment through looming
greaves that pressed in ever closer, then like a falcon long
upon the wing seeing no lure or prey descends weary
making the falcon sigh “Now you fall” circling round and
round a hundred times, where before it had been swift and
landing proudly some way away from its master, so
Geryon set us down on the bottom close to the foot of that
tock hewn wall and free of our weight, suddenly vanished
like an arrow set buzzing from the bow.



Canto XVIII



In hell there is a place called Malebolge, made of stone, the colour of iron ore, just like the cliff walls that circumscribe it. Right in the middle of that evil space yawns a huge hole deep and wide. I will explain in due course its structure. Between the hole and the rock foot of that forbidding cliff the land descends in ten successive rings as the pattern of moats around the fort protects the ramparts with concentric walls. And as from the entrance of such a fort, so here running here across the banks and ditches were bridges from the cliff base to the well gathering them all and cutting them short. Here we found ourselves shaken off by Geryon's shoulders.

The poet turned to the left and I went after him. At my right hand I saw fresh agonies with new torments and new torturers filling the first ditch. The sinners in its depths walked naked. Those on our side of its middle faced us, those beyond it went in our direction though faster like the Jubilee year when huge crowds gathered and the romans contrived that the people crossing the bridge on one side faced the castle as they made their way towards Saint Peter's and on the other all went in the direction of the mount. On either side along the gloomy rock I saw horned devils bearing huge long whips who lashed the souls cruelly from the rear. How they leapt up squirming at the first crack. No shade paused for a second blow or a third.

As I passed by, one of them met my glance. Instantly I said now him I do know. So I stopped to study him more closely and my gentle leader paused too, giving me

permission to take a few steps back. The lashed shade thinking to conceal himself hung his head low but to little effect. I said “You, head down, unless you are disguised you are Venedico Caccianimico. So what brings you to such a sticky end?”

He replied “I am loathed to answer you but your accent forces me bringing back memories of the world above. It was I who coaxed my sister Ghisola bella to serve the Marquis’s lust however shameless the story sounds. Other Bolognese weep here with me though. The place is crammed full. Not those many tongues are taught these days to say sips in Reno and Savena. If you want a reliable witness just remember our avaricious spent.”

And as he spoke, the daemon lashed with his whip and cried “Get away you pimp. There are no women for you to sell here.”

When I rejoined my guide a few paces took us to where a rocky ridge ran out jutting from the bank. We climbed this with ease and turning right along its jagged top left those eternally circling spirits.

We reached the place where the ridges hollowed to form a passage underneath for the scourged. And my guide said “Stop and take in the sight of those other mis-begotten spirits whose faces you could not see before now since they were walking in our direction.”

So from that that ancient bridge we watched the ranks that came towards us on the other side. Driven on as the others were by the lash. And without my asking my good master said “Look at that grand one approaching us now, who does not seem to shed a tear of pain. How regally he still carries himself. That is Jason, who with courage and wit took the golden fleece from the Colchians. He journeyed to the island Lemnos too, where the pitiless women had slaughtered all the men. There with words and looks of love he seduced the young maid Hypsipyle who had herself gulled the other women and then he left her pregnant and alone. Such guilt condemns him to this punishment and Medea exact her vengeance too. That type of deceivers all go with him, let that be sufficient of the first ditch and the sinner imprisoned in its jaws.”

Now we had come to the narrow pathway that intersects the second bank and forms the shoulder of another rising arch. Here we heard the souls deep in the next pit whimpering, making grunts and snorting sounds and beating at themselves with open palms. A foul vapour crusted the banks with mold, that floating up, clogged their eyes and noses. The bottom was so deep, we had no view except by climbing the arch and peering down the full height of the rocky bridge.

We reached the spot and from there I saw people down in the ditch plunged in excrement that might have flowed directly from the world. And while I searched blow with probing eyes I saw one soul's head so fouled in crap you could not say if he were clark or lay. He shouted “Why are

you looking at me more than at the other scum". I said to him "If I remember I once saw you your hair clean unless you are Interminei of Lucca. That's why I watch you more than the others."

Beating on his part he said then to me "Flattery with which my tongue wagged tirelessly submerged me here below."

"Look further" advised my guide "on that woman's face at that rumped and filthy drab, now scratching herself with foul nails and crouching now, now standing on her feet. That is Thais. The whore who replied to her lover's question when he asked her "Are you most grateful?", "Ahhh, incredibly."

I think by now we have seen enough here.

Canto XIX



O Simon magus, O sad disciples, rapacious creatures, prostitutes for cash, for gold and silver things that are of God, that men of virtue should hold for ever. Now the trumpet should sound its blast for you. You finish up here down in the third pit.

We had already climbed to the next grave up the rocky ridge which hangs directly just above the ditch. O supreme wisdom! What great artistry you display in Heaven, on earth and hell and how justly you dispense your power.

Along the sides in bottom I could see the livid rock was bored riddled by holes, all round and similar in size and width. To me they seemed no larger or deeper, than those inside my Saint Giovanni, designed basins for baptismal rites, one of which not so many years ago I broke to save someone drowning in it. That's the truth, so let the matter rest. Out of the mouth of each hole, there emerged a sinner's feet and his legs up to the calf. The rest of the body was stuffed inside. The soles of their feet were licked by flames, making their limbs twitch in spasm so strong, they would have snapped any rope that bound them. And just as oily flames will only glide across the surface, here the fire slid from heel to toe across the foot.

“Master” I said “Who is that riding spirit there who twitches more than the others and burns with flames fierce and so red” And so he said “I will carry you if you like to the bank lower down. You can hear his story there.”

“Whatever pleases you will please me too.” I replied “Your word commands me. You know my secret thoughts unspoken.”

We made our way to the fourth bank, turned and made our way down, keeping to the left within that narrow deep, riddled with all its holes. My kindly guide did not put down his load until the hole of the one who showed his pain with his legs.

“Whoever you may be you wretched soul, stuck upside down and planted like a stake, speak to me if you still have that power.” There I stood, just like some friar confessing a vile assassin whose time had been fixed but who calls him back to put off dying.

“Is that you Boniface standing there? The chronicles have lied to me by several years. Are you already jaded with the death for which you deceived and mangled the church, the fairest of women?”

I stood and stared unable to respond, like someone mocked.

Vergil addressed me then “Go on tell him, say ‘I am not the one you think I am.’ ” So I said it just as he asked me to. At which the spirits feet twitched in frenzy heaving a sigh he answered me his voice heavy with tears. “What is it that you want? If you are so eager you came down the bank, know that one side rests in the great mantle. But was in truth one of the she-bear’s sons and was so keen to

advance the bear cubs I pocketed wealth and down here my self. Under my head flattened the fissures cover other souls who came before me sinning in simony. I shall join them when he comes one I thought you were, when I was so quick to ask my question. But my feet have burned longer and I have been upside down longer than he shall stay here with his feet on fire. For from the West will come the lawless shepherd whose deeper deeds are foul enough to cover him and me.”

Perhaps I was too bold when I spoke here for I said replying to him “Tell me what gold did our lord seek from St. Peter before he placed the keys in his hands? None, he said only ‘Follow me’. Did Peter or the others demand gold or silver from meths in the ballet for the place that the wicked Judas lost? Stay stuck there where your torment is deserved. Watch over your stolen gold carefully that made you so courageous against Charles. And were it not for my reverence for those great keys you held once still living, I would make use of even harsher words, because your avarice saddens all the world, trampling the good, promoting the wicked. You have made yourself a God of gold and silver. How are you different from the heathen then, save that they prey to one and you to a hundred? Ah Constantine! What wickedness was born, not from your conversion but from the gift received by the first pope that made him rich.”

While I was chanting such a song to him, from wroth or the knowing truth of conscience, he lunged violently with both his feet. I do believe my guide was well pleased for he

listened satisfied to the sound of the truth I spoke, and then gathered me in his arms, close to his chest, and climbed up the same path he had climbed down before. Nor did he grow tired of carrying me until the summit of the arch that spans the fourth bank and the fifth. With gentle care he set down his load on the steep rough ridge, a path that will be difficult for goats, from there another valley was revealed.

Canto XX

New punishments in my theme and matter for the twentieth canto of part one that deals with those sunk deep beneath the earth. Now I was ready and prepared to peer into the depths of sinner's anguished tears. And I saw there in the valley of circles souls walking with the speed that penitents in our world proceed, silent and weeping.

As my scrutiny continued I saw an amazing deformation between their chins and where the chest begins. Faces back to front. Looked down towards the haunches. To move ahead they walked but in reverse, denied the means of looking to the front. It may be that through some paralysis someone at sometime was twisted like this. But I have yet to see and I doubt it.

So God may grant you reader, benefit from my poem. Consider for yourself how I could stop from crying when nearby I saw a human shape so distorted that tears falling from the eyes poured down to splash the buttons at left. Indeed I wept leaning on a rock jutting from the ridge.

“Still like all the other fools.” My guide spoke “What can be worse than the man who adds his own suffering to God's just decree. Lift! Lift up your head and look at him there for whom the earth gaped wide while the Thebans' eyes looked on and cried out ‘I am Amphiaraus, why are you rushing? Why desert the fray?’. Nor did his head long fore cease before Minos who gets his clutches into every soul. See how he makes a chest from his shoulders because he

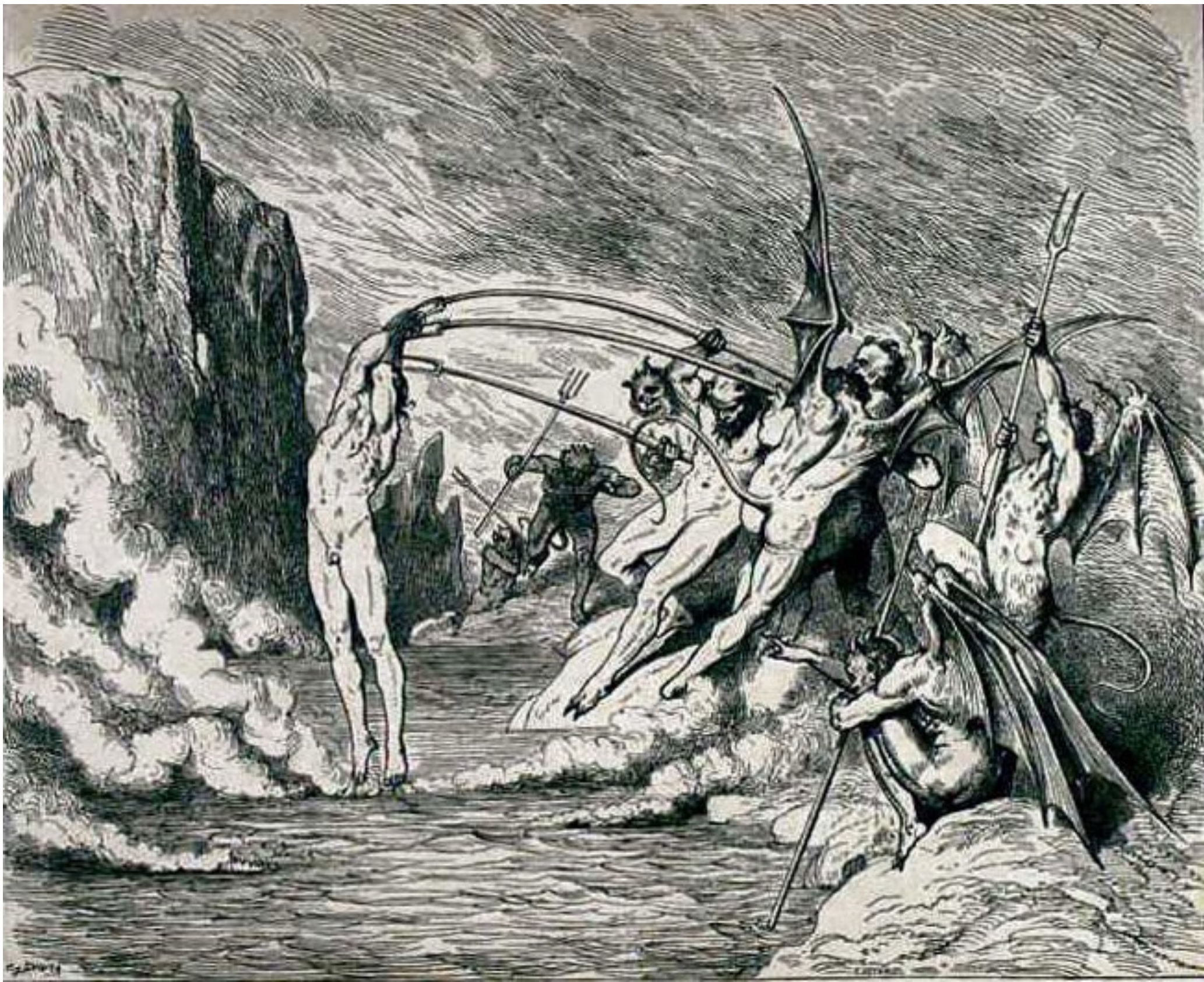
wish to see too far ahead. Now he looks behind and goes in reverse. See their Tiresias who changed from man and to woman transformed in every limb. So before his plumage was male again, he had to strike his wand another time against a pair of intertwining snakes. She whose unbound tresses conceal her breasts and her hairs in front, but now behind her was Manto who wandered through many lands, then settled in the place where I was born. Let me tell you a little of her tale. After her father left the living and Bacchus' city fell to slavery, she spent long years roaming through out the world. Now up in fair Italy lies a lake below the Apline link with Germany above Tyrol. Benaco is its name. No doubt a thousand steams or more cascade from Apaninee to Val Camonica to Garda in whose lake their waters rest. In the centre is a place where all three bishops Trentine, Brescia and Veronese could grant a blessing should they take that road. What will not stay in Benaco's bosom cascades down to former river that flows through green meadows. It gathers speed and weight. Not the Benaco's now, but the Mincio until it joins Po at Governo. But just before it runs its course, it spreads over lowlands, turning it to a swamp. In summer time the source rank odour. There, passing by, the savage virgin lying in the middle of the marsh, land uncultivated and uninhabited, here to practice her arts and to avoid all human intercourse she with her slaves came to settle and finally died there. In time the scattered people of those parts drew to those sports protected by the marsh. They built a city over those dead bones and called it Mantua because of her not because of any omen had cast.

I tell you this if you ever hear my city had another origin you will not let those lies pollute the truth.”

“Master I am convinced by what you say, anything else would seem like burnt out coals” I said “Tell me these people passing by, are any of them worthy of remark? Because my mind is tuned to that.” To which he answered “That one over there whose beard is spread over his swarthy shoulders was a soothsayer, when so few men were left in Greece even the cradles were bear. His name Eryphylus. He can be found somewhere in my tragedy, as you who knows through and through knows well. And he, the skin and bone was Michael Scott, the master of magical deception. See those dreadful women who laid aside needles, shuttles and spindles for witchcraft, binding their spells with herbs and effigies. But lets move. Already Cain with his thorns touches the sea beyond Seville, one half in each hemisphere. You must remember the moon was full last night and there were times when she did no harm in that deep wood.”

This is what he said , meanwhile we walked on.

Canto XXI



From one bridge to the next we continued discussing subjects that my comedy cares not to sing of. We gained the summit and paused to view another cavity of Malebolge, the next ravine of tears, and so it was mysteriously dark.

As in the Venice Arsenal, where boils a sticky pitch in winter, smears the leaks in unsafe ships which cannot set sail, and some rebuild their craft from scratch while others make repairs on vessels well voyaged, so here, not by fire, but the art divine, there boiled below a thick and pitchy mass forming a viscous coat on either bank.

I stared at it. We could see nothing there except bubbles rising from the boiling. And it all heaved and settled down again. While I was gazing intently below, my guide exclaimed and hauled me from the edge at which I turned like one who looks to see when he should run, struck by sudden terror, but looking back does not delay his flight. And so a jet black devil come behind, running at speed along the stony ridge. What a terrifying mask his face was. How cruel he seemed with every moment made and so nimble on his feet with spread wings, bearing on his sharply pointed shoulder, he had slung a sinner by both his thighs, clutching him by the sinews of the heel.

“Malebranche” He shouted from our bridge “I have an elder of Saint Zita; you shove him under, I will go back for more. His city is well stocked with ones like him. Everyone there is a cheat except Bonturo, in look a, no becomes a yes for cash. He threw him down and turned along the

rock. No dog was ever swift to chase a thief quite so fast. The sinner sank, then surfaced but the daemons from beneath the bridge cried “No place here for the sacred face, no swimming here like in the Serchio. If you want to avoid our grappling hooks, stay down below the level of the pitch.”

Then they stabbed at him with a hundred prongs shouting “Here you keep here under cover swindling beneath the surface” like cooks who have scullions to poke meat with hooks so it does not float in the pot.

My master said “Don't let them see you crouch behind a rock to get some cover. And do not be afraid whatever they say. I had to face something like it before.”

He passed the bridge ahead and reached the sixth bank. I needed then to look as bold as brass. For with a fury like nothing else than a frenzied rush of dogs at some poor man who stops to beg, they stormed from where they hid and set up on him with their grappling irons.

“Stop the lot of you!” He shouted “Just one, come forward to listen to me, then see if you want to poke me with your grapples”

“Malacoda you go!” They all shouted out. And one stepped out muttering “Now what good will this do him?”

My master said “Now then Malacoda, do you think I can get this far and still sage despite your obstacles and defences without Divine approval and fate’s accord. Let me pass now. It is willed in Heaven. I must show another this savage path.”

His pride was so pricked that the daemon dropped his prong but said to the others “Let him go unharmed!”



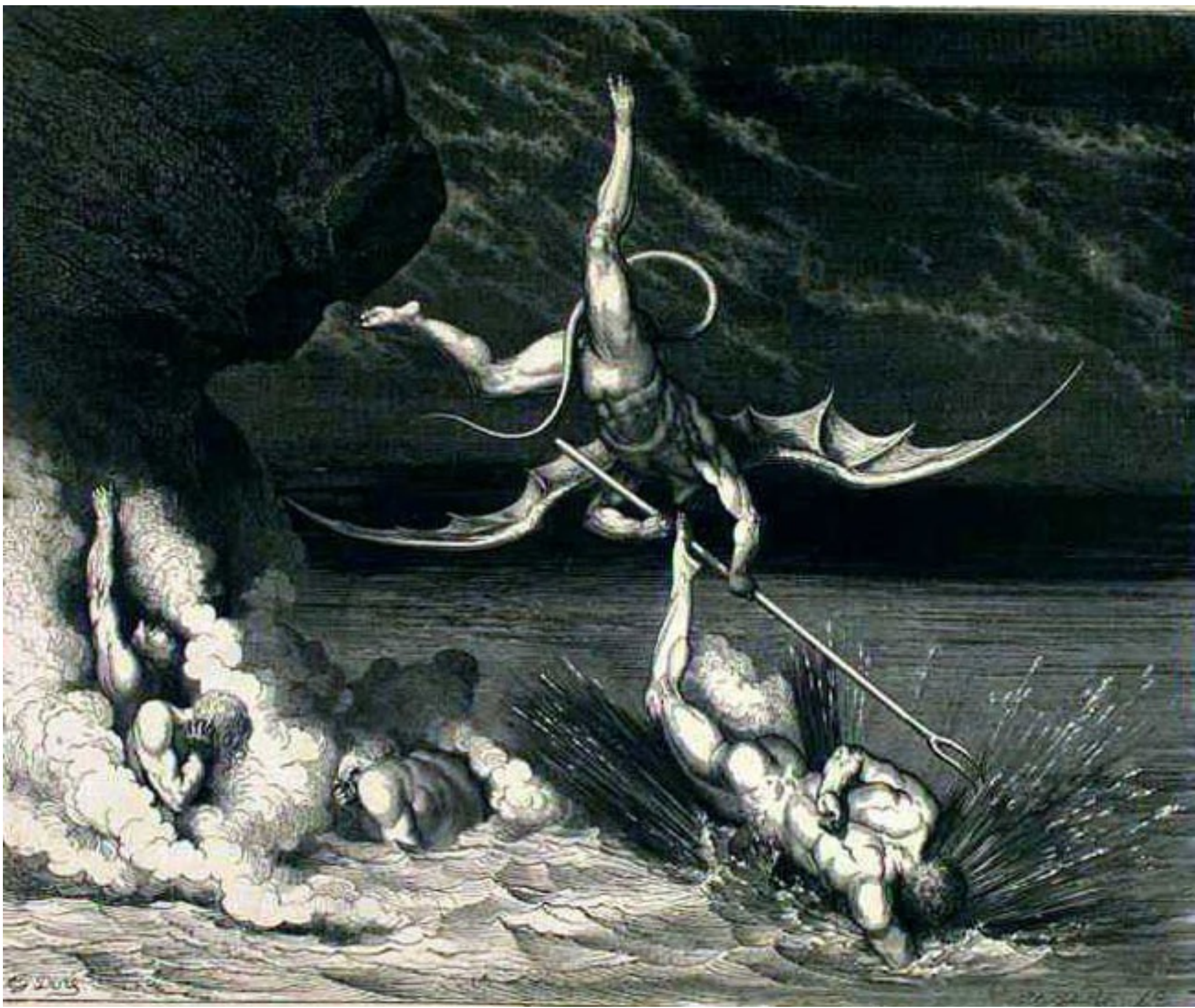
My leader called to me “You hiding there crouched among the boulders of the bridge, it is safe to come”. So I came and with speed the devils now edged forward all of them so I fear they might not keep their word. They aimed their prongs at us and one muttered “Shall I jab him in the ass?”

“Good and hard!” they shouted as one.

But Malacoda talking with my leader took ground and screamed “Leave it Scarmiglione, leave it out.” Then announced to us “You cannot go on much further by this rock bridge. The sixth arch lies all smashed to bits in the pit below but if you want to continue go down this ridge a while. There is an archway there. Five hours from this time yesterday one thousand two hundred and sixty six years have passed since the road wrecked here. I am sending some of my troop down there to see that no one is coming up for air. Go with them, they will do no damage. Over here Alichino, Calcabrina, Cagnazzo, you Barbariccia, you are incharge. Libicocco, Draghignazzo you too, toothy Ciriatto ,Graffiacane, and Farfarello, the mad Rubicante, go and scout all around the boiling mess. Make sure they are safe to the other bridge. The pass is complete over the ditches.”

“Master I am not sure about this at all.” I said “Lets go alone, no need of escort. Do we really need them? You know the way, if you are as keen as you usually are. Have you not noticed them gnashing away and threading us with their betel eyebrows?” But he said “There is no reason to fear. Let them gnash away just as they want to. It is for the seething sinners not for us.” They turned off to the left along the ridge. But not till each of them had nipped his tongue between his teeth to salute their leader. And he had farted like a trumpet to them.

Canto XXII



I have seen troops of horse men moving camp, opening attack or at the muster, even fleeing for their lives in retreat. And I have seen mounted scouts ride through your land, you Aretines. I have seen foragers on the march. Have seen the clash of tournaments, tilting, at times with trumpets and at times with bells, drums or rockets from the castle tower. But never saw horsemen or infantry move on or a ship that sails by star or landmark, signals that set off by a bagpipe quite as odd.

My eyes were fixed intently on the pitch, observing all the features of the ditch and who were the people being burned there. As dolphins, when they show their curving backs , singling the mariners, it said, to stir themselves, to rig their ship for storms, so, to alleviate the pain from time to time, one of the sinners would expose his back, then ducking down, vanish quick as lightning. And just as on the margin of the ditch, frogs sit, squat with only their snouts exposed to hide their feet and conceal their bodies, the sinners crouched, either side of their pond, but with Barbariccia coming closer, plunged back beneath the bubbling mass of pitch.

I saw, my heart still shudders at the thought, one loiter like this as sometimes a frog remains behind when another swims off. Graffiacan, the daemon next to him grappled him by his sticky pitchy hair and hold him up looking like an otter. By now I recognised them all by name. I had noticed when they were being chosen and listened as they called to each other.

“O Rubicante, see you set your claws well down into his back to flaying good.” They shouted out in a chorus together.

I said “Master, if you can discover who is that unlucky wretch just fallen into the hands of his adversaries.”

My guide approached him and asked who he was “I am from the kingdom of Navarre .” He said ”My mother put me to service with the lord. Because of my father being a waster ruined himself and lost all his goods. Then I served the house of good King Thibault where I took to craft which now I pay for punished by this burning.”

Ciriatto whose mouth had two boar like tusks sticking out on either side, let him feel how they ripped. The mouse had fallen prey to evil cats. But Barbariccia hanging on to him said “Get back, get back while I stick it to him” He turned to us and said to my master “Ask him now if you want to know much more before the others tear him to bits.”

My guide went on “Tell me of the sinners down there. Are any others Italian?”

“I was just with one then who came from there and I wish I was below with him too. Safe from these hooks and claws.”

“Enough!” said Libicocco and hooked the sinner taking a chunk of flesh out of his arm. Draghignazzo tried it too in

the legs but captain turned on them with a scowl and the moment they calmed down, a little, my guide immediately asked the shade while his eyes were still fixed on his new wound and said “Who was it you left to come ashore?” And he replied “It was Friar Gomita of Gallura, a pot topped up with fraud. When he had his hands on the enemies of his master, he took the cash they gave and as he admits softly let them go. The treatment they received delighted them. He swindled in other posts too. Large sums. Don Michael Zanche of Logodoro keeps company with him there. They gossip endlessly about Sardinia. Look how that one snarls at me. I would say more if I wasn’t scared if he would stick his claws in.” Then the captain turned on Farfarello whose rolled eyes warned he was about to strike yelling “Get out of it you filthy bird!”

“If you want to hear Tuscans or Lombards” that terror stricken shade began again “I can get him to come for you, but first let the Malebranche back away, or the other souls wont risk the surface. I alone just sitting where I am can summon seven souls with my whistle which is the way we signal to emerge.”

Cagnazzo raised his muzzle at these words, wagged his head and said “Listen to him! What a trick to get back under cover.” And he never without his tricks replied “What kind of trickery for my friends?” Alichin could not resist the dare shouting in opposition to the rest. “Try it then. I will get to you and not galloping but swimping about the pitch with my wings. Lets leave the region high behind the bank. We will see if you get the better of us.”

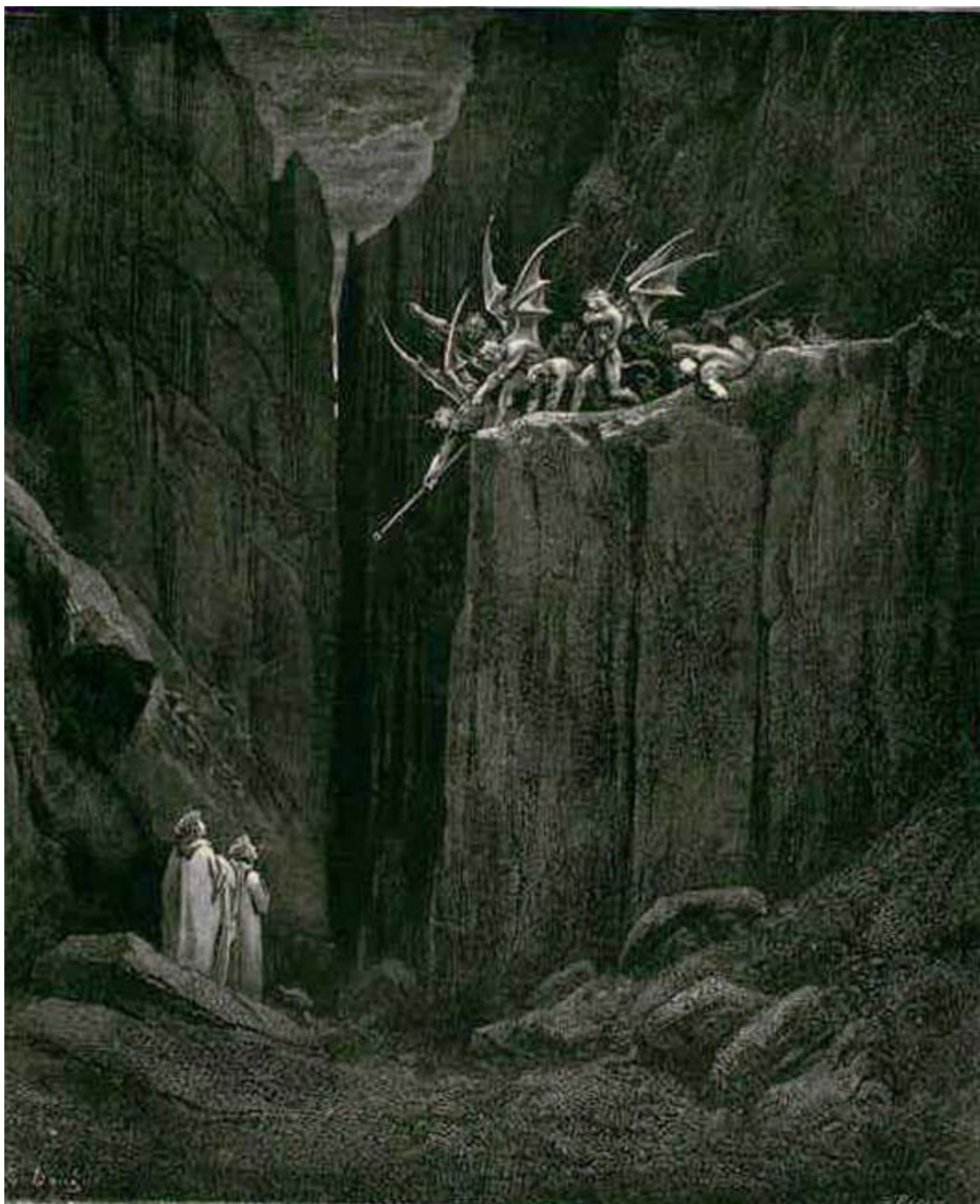
O reader just listen to this new sport. They all turned towards the slope. First had turned the daemon who was most against it and Navarrese's moment was well picked. Once he set his feet upon the ground, he leapt in a twinkling and so left free from the design. The squad was stung by shame, but mostly the one who had cocked it up rushed after him shouting "I will have you" to small effect. His wings could not compete with the flight of terror. The soul plunged down and the flying daemon had to stop his dive, just like a falcon swooping on a duck which dies out of sight, forcing the falcon baffled to retreat and to soar again.

Calcabrina though enraged at the cheat was not so unhappy with the outcome since he could start a brawl with another daemon. And when the spirit vanished out of site, turned against his companion with his claws and grappled in the air along the ditch, but the other was no mean hawk himself and used his talents. Both fell plunging down into the middle of the boiling pool. Although the heat quickly forced them to part, their wings were stuck in pitch and so were they. Barbariccia as angry as the rest had four fly to the other side as quickly as they could. In position they stretched their grapples to the clotted pair. By this time each one was cooked and crusty.

Then we left them still tangled in their farce.



Canto XXIII



Silent and alone, without an escort, we walked on. One in front and one behind, like two Franciscan Friars on the road. By now I felt my hair all stand on end with terror and glanced around behind me while saying “Master if you don’t conceal yourself and me quite speedily I fear the Malebranche. They are already after us, am sure. I feel them coming.” He said to me “If I were a mirror your outwards image would be reflected no quicker than your inner thoughts reach me. But now your thoughts join mine identically. So I formed a single plan from both. If the right side of the slope falls our way to the next ravine, we can slip in there and escape the hunt that haunts us that way.”

He had not even finished telling me as planned when not far away I saw them wings spread out in the hope of catching us. My guide snatched me up instantly just as the mother awakened by a noise sees the rising flames close by her, grabs her child and runs, not lingering for some garment. So from the summit of the bank he slid on his back, right down the sloping rock face that hems in one side of the other ditch.

No gushing water flowing through a sluice to turn a mill wheel ever ran faster than my master bore me off down that bank, clutched to his chest as if I were his son, not just his mere companion. But scarcely had his feet touched the bottom of the ditch, when on the ridge above us, there they were. But now there was no reason to worry. High providence which made them masters of the fifth pit

removes from them the power to leave and confines them there.

Down below we found a painted people. Slowly making their way around, step by step, weeping as they went by with weary looks. They all wore cloaks with the hoods pulled low covering their eyes, much like in Cologne the benedictines wear, dazzling gild cloaks but made of lead inside and so heavy King Frederick's to them would seem of straw. A weary cloak for all eternity.

We turned again to the left, joining them, their miserable wailing in our ears. But wearied by their load these people walked so slowly that with every step we took we found ourselves in new company. So I said to my guide "Could you find one who is notorious by deed or name, as we pass by like this?" Someone heard me with my Tuscan tongue and from behind us cried "Not so fast you hurrying through the dark. Perhaps I might be the one to answer" My guide turned around and told me "Wait for him and then carry on at his pace".

I paused. The two I saw whose look betrayed a haste which reached me were hundred by the pathway with its crowd and their load but caught us up. They looked askance at me saying nothing, then turning to each other they observed "This one seems alive! Look at his throat move. If they are dead, then but by what great honour do they walk here without the heavy stall." Then they said to me. "Tuscan you have joined your order of sad hypocrites. Tell us. Don't be too proud. Who are you?" I said then "I was

born and raised in the great city through which the fair Arno flows. My body is the same one that I had always had. But who are you with your tears of misery? What is the torment that's sparkles on you?"

One answered me "These gold capes of ours are leaden and so heavy that their weight makes us creek like an overloaded scale. We were jovial friars, Bolognese, I was Catalano, he Loderingo. We were elected by our own city. Both, instead of one to keep the peace for one we were, look around Gardingo."

"O Friars" I began "Your evil deeds." But said no more. Could not. I saw one crucified with three stakes on the ground. On seeing me he twisted himself about and heaved some heavy sighs into his beard. Seeing this Friar Catalan, explained "That nailed down figure you are staring at there advised the Pharisees it was prudent to torture one man for the people's sake. He lies splayed out, naked on the road, as you see first to feel the weight of all who pass by, his father in law is here ragged out in this ditch and the counsellor who seeded so much evil for the jews."

Then I saw looking in wonder at the spirit spread out on the cross for eternity and shameful banishment.

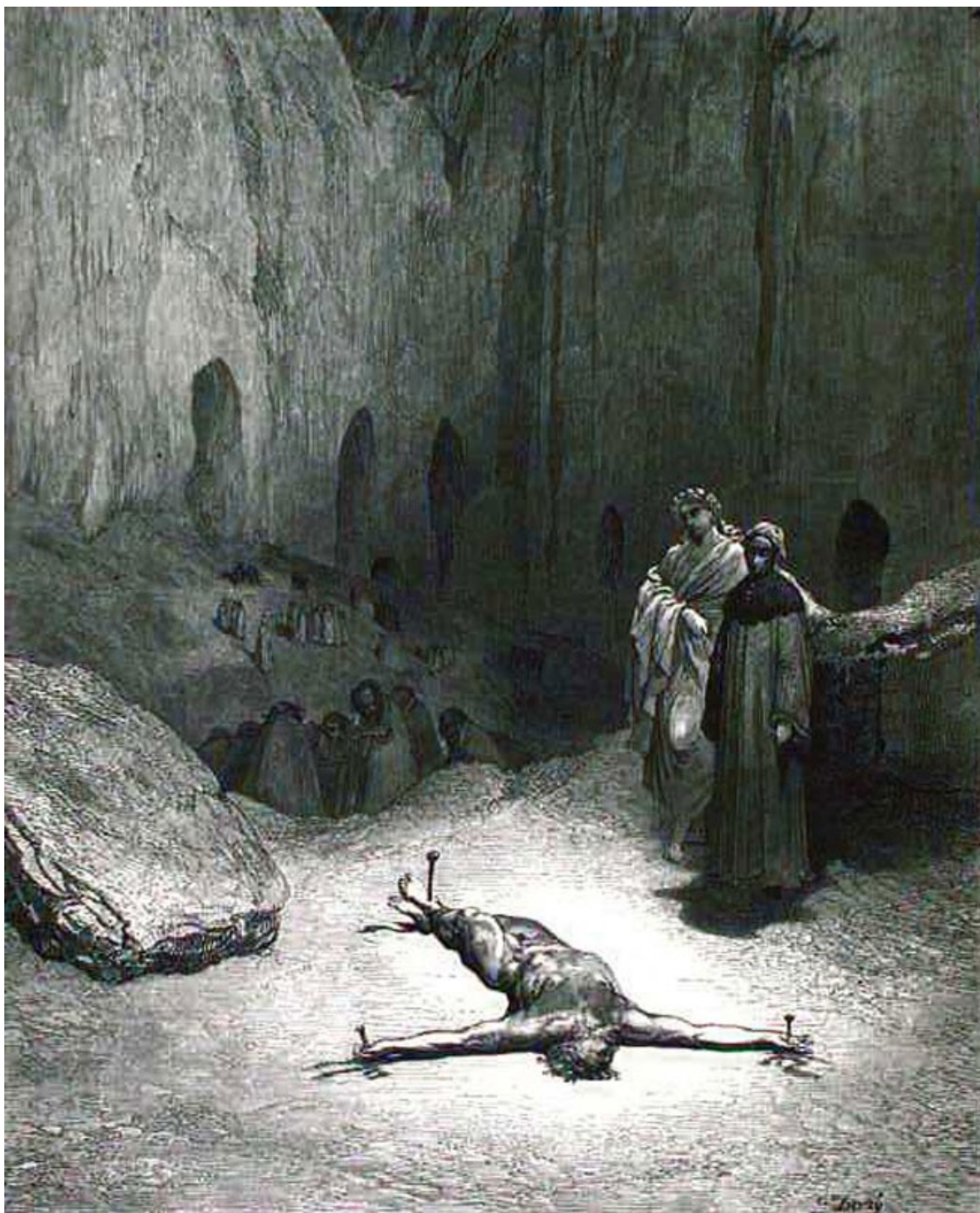
Then he addressed a question to the Friar "Could you please tell us, if its allowed, is there a way we could take to the right without summoning black angels to help to liberate us from this pit?"

“Quite near,” He replied “there is a rock that bridges all the pits from the rim but here it is smashed. You can climb up the fallen mass of rock piled in the bottom sloping at this sides.”

My guide paused a moment looking thoughtful then spoke “The one who hooks the sinners there described it to us slightly differently.”

“Heard at Bologna“ The friar said “I heard all about the devil’s vices. I heard among other things, he was a liar. Indeed he is the father of all lies.”

After this my guide stroked off, rather cross and I departed the overburdened souls and followed in the track of his dear feet.



Canto XXIV

In that part of the young year, when the Sun under aquarius revives its rays and the nights shrink to last as long as days, when the hoar-frost painting on the ground mocks the very image of his white sister, though the color of his brush strokes soon fade. The peasant wakes and sees the whitened fields, and running low on fodder, thumps his thighs and goes back inside, complains like some poor soul not knowing what to do. Then looks once more with renewed hope at the worlds' face so changed in such a little time; takes up his crook and drives his lambs to feed on green pasture. Just so my master filled me with despair when I saw the anxious look his face wore. And as promptly, came the remedy to cure, because when we approached the ruined bridge my guide turned to me without that gently look I encountered first at the mountain's foot. Then having surveyed the ruin with care he opened wide his arms and swept me up like one who acts with judgement and who seems always to plan ahead. So helping me climb one great boulder he then assessed another fragment saying "Climb up now on top of that but test it first to see it is secure and will support your weight."

No pathway there for any who wore those cloaks. For we, he weightless and I with his help could barely make the climb from hold to hold and had the bank we climbed not been lower than the one it faced I would have failed it, though I cannot speak the hymn.

But since the slope of Malebolge slips towards the yawning mouth of the deepest of the pits, each of the valleys is laid out so that one bank is higher while the next stands lower. We came at last however to a point above the last stone of the ruined bridge. The breath was so exhausted in my lungs from all the clambering, I sat down there on the summit unable to go on.

“Come on, time to shake off this laziness” My master said “sitting on downy cushions and warming bed is no way to find fame. And without it the man consumes his life leaving no more enduring trace on earth than smoke in air or foam on the water. On your feet! Defeat fatigue with spirit and the indomitable will that wins, unless the dulled body cramps its power. There is a longer stairway to be climbed. It's not enough just to scale this one. If you have understood me take courage.”

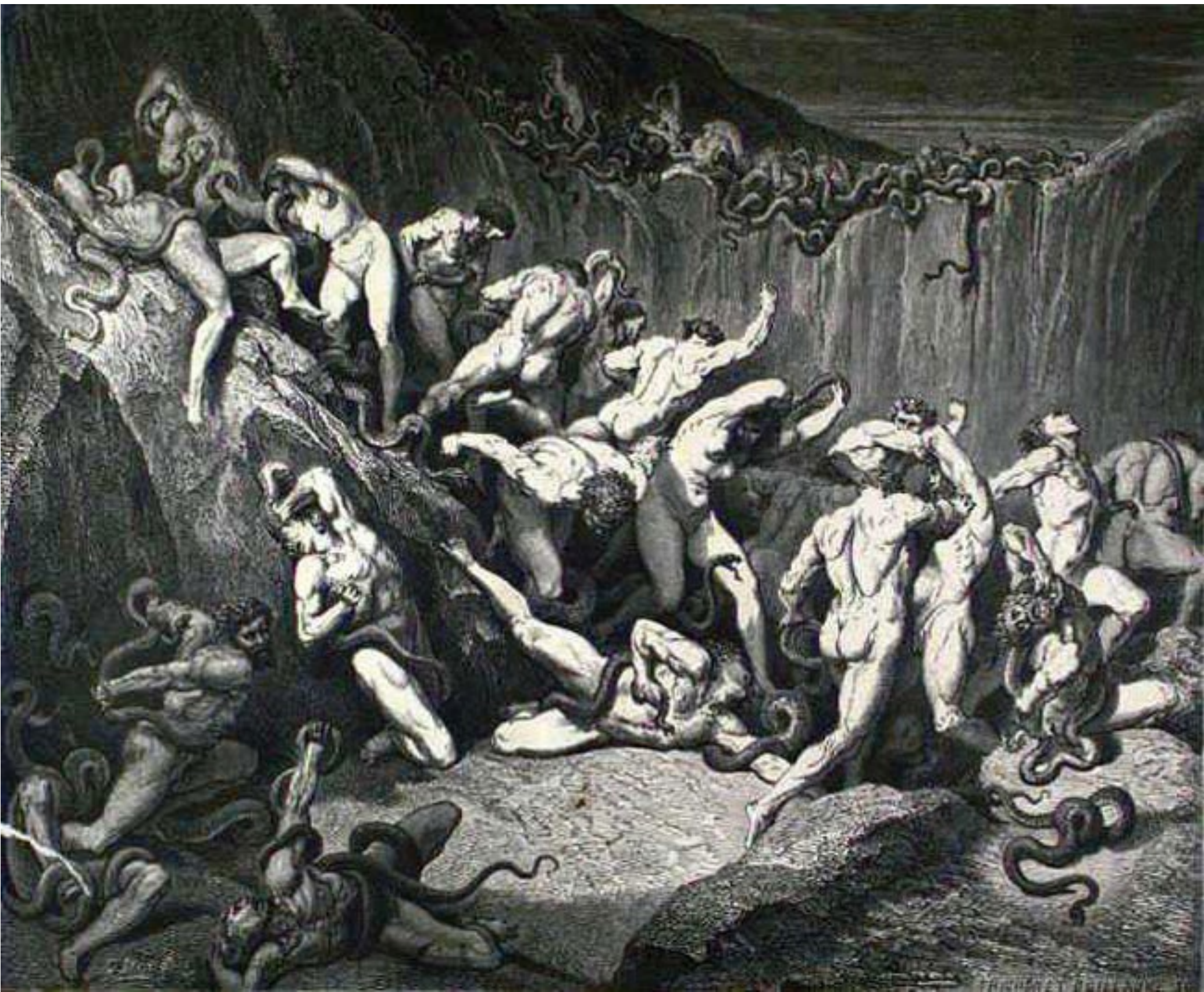
At this I stood up, pretending I was in better breath than I had claimed before and said “On! Am ready and willing.” So by the rocky ridge we went our way. A rugged way, narrow and difficult. Far steeper than the one I climbed before. And as I went I talked not to seem weak. Then from the next chasm issued a voice but of a sort unsuited to speaking. I could not make it out although by now I was on the very top of the arch. Whoever spoke appeared to move around, I bet ride over, but no living eye could penetrate the depth of that darkness. “Master let us try for the other bank and descend this wall.” I said “I listen but there is nothing I can understand, I look there is nothing I can see.”

“No other response but to do the thing. Fair requests need no answer but the deed.” He said and climbed down the bridge where it met with the eighth bank.

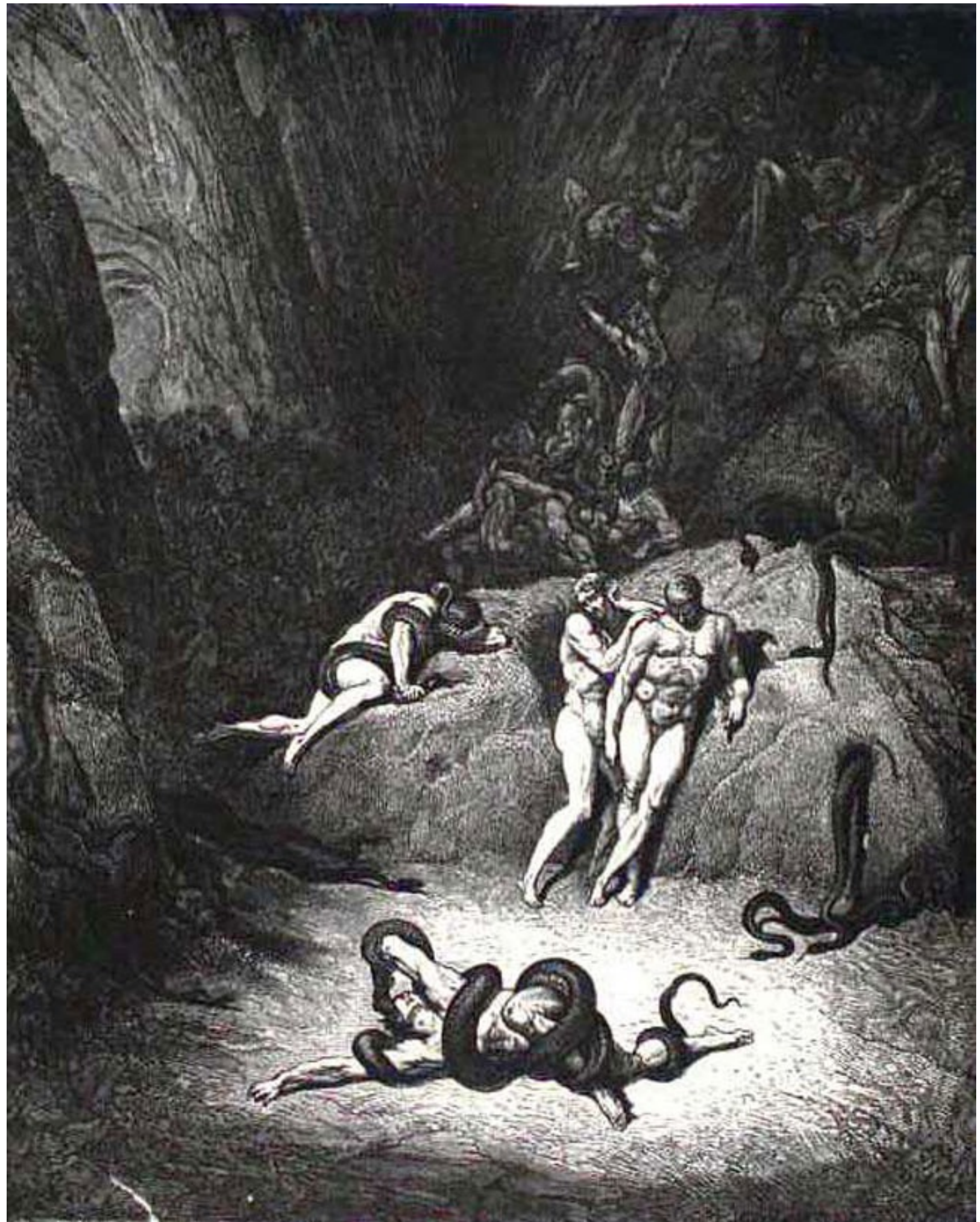
There exposed was the pit. I saw then a mass of hideous riving snakes of every type and variation. The recollection of it chills my blood. Among this cruel distressing loathsome swarm, people were running naked, terror struck, hopeless of refuge or of heliotrope. Their hands were bound from behind with snakes which hid between their loins, coiling up and knotting in the front. There, right by our bank, running past, a sinner struck by a serpent springing at his neck. No one ever scribbled a letter O or I as quick as he caught fire and burnt. And as he fell his ashes scattered across the ground but these scattered ashes came together returning to the form they had before. Just as it is asserted by sages that when it reaches its 500th year the phoenix dies and then is born again. Then as a man who falls not knowing why dragged down perhaps by some demonic force or some blockage of his vital spirits, who returning to his feet stares around him holy bewildered by the dreadful shock he has endured, groaning as he gazes, such was the sinner after he had risen. O how harsh the blows of Divine justice can be and how pitiless God's vengeance!

My guide then asked the soul who he was. He said “I fell like rain from Tuscany not long ago into this foul gullet. A bestial life more than a human pleased me. I am van Vanni Fucci, a lout and Pistoia was my fitting den.”

I asked my guide “Tell him not to move and ask him what crime thrust him own here I knew him as a man of blood and rage.” The sinner heard turning his face to me colouring wit the agony of shame and said “That you have caught me in this pitch you see me suffering and sees me more than when my other life was snatched form me. But how can I refuse what you ask. I was sent down this far because I robbed the sacristy of its fine ornaments for which another man received the blame. But in case you rejoice of what you have seen, if you ever manage to escape here, pay attention, listen to what I say. Pistoia will tear the black party, then Florence will renew her men and laws. From Val di Magra, Mars will draw a fiery thunderbolt enveloped in angry cloud with a bitter storm as swift as so, battle shall rage on the field of Campo Picen and the cloud will burst so suddenly that every white will be wounded by it and I have told you this to cause to pain.”



Canto XXV



With this, the thief, having finished his speech raised both hands and cocked two V signs shouting “Take that, God, so much for you”. And from then I counted all his snakes as friends to me. For one of them was coiling around his throat as if to say ‘That’s enough of that’. Another bound his arms in front so tight he could not make the merest muscle twitch. Ah Pistoia, Pistoia, end it now! Burn yourself to ashes rather than bleed such types whose sins out do their father’s crimes.

In all the darkest crevices of hell I saw no soul with such contempt of God, but even he who fell from Thebes down the ramparts. The wretch then left without another word. And I saw a Centaur wild with fury roaring out “Where is he, that bitter one?”

Maremma cannot boast I doubt more snakes than those clustered on his back to where the human in him began emerging and on his shoulders, crouched behind his neck, a dragon, wings spread blue, fired any soul across his path.

“That centaur” said my guide “is Cacus who often made lakes of blood around his lair beneath Mount Aventine. He does not trade his brother’s path because of that deceitful robbery he did. He stole his neighbour’s famous herd by fraud. His crimes were ended by Hercules’s club, which struck a hundred blows. Ten were enough.”

Cacus rushed off but as my guide spoke three souls approached though I was unaware like him until one shouted “Who are you?” At this our discussion concluded

sharply and we concentrated on them alone. Who they were I could not tell. But it chanced that one was forced to call another's name exclaiming "Where has Cianfa got to?" So to stop my guide from saying something I put my finger up against my lips.

If, reader, you now grow incredulous of what I have to say, little wonder. I can scarcely believe it and I saw while I was watching them quite suddenly a serpent with six feet shot through the air and landed on the sinner clinging there. It hooked this belly with the middle feet and pinned its fore legs tight around his arms. Then sank its fangs in each cheek, left then right, splaying its hind legs to grip round both things curving under it, thrust its tail between to grip the buttocks, snaking up his back. No ivy ever wrapped around a tree with a hold of limbs this beast applied. Then like melting wax, they fused together with their shapes and colors intermingling. Neither one seemed what it had been before. As when a piece of paper burns, there is a brownish tinge that goes before the flame which not completely black consumes the white. The other two stared and began to shout "Agnello, you are changing! You are neither the one nor the other."

By now single head replaced the two. Both sets of features smudging into one. Lost in each other. Then the four upper limbs dissolved to form two great swollen arms, thighs and hind legs merged. From breast and belly limbs sprouted as were never seen before. It crept away, this monstrous pervasion. Its original identities gone. Then as a lizard darts from a hedge to hedge beneath the burning

lash of dog day sun scooting on the path quick as lighting,
so zipping towards the other two thieves and going for the
gut, a little snake black as a pepper corn and as fiery sank
its fangs from where unborn we feed. Then fell back down,
stretched out in front of him. The thief just stared
unspeaking, standing there and yawned, as if taken by
sleep or fever. The serpent watched. A glare the soul
returned. Smoke then pours from the wound and from the
snake the smoke mixes.

Lucan be silent here about Sabellus and Nassidius. Just
listen. Ovid too with his Cadmus and Arethusa, who in his
poem turned one into a snake, one a fountain. I feel no
envy for these other authors. They never took two beings
face to face and transmuted them. One in to the other. In
tight symmetry the snake's tails splits into a fork and the
wounded sinners feet joined together. The legs up to his
thighs close in and fuse and show no sign of a being two.
The cloven tail took on the shape they lost. And its skin
grew soft, the other scaly. I saw his arms retreat into their
pits while the beast's two stunted front feet began to
stretch their length. The sinner's grew short. The hind legs,
twisted together to form the private organ of a man
whereas from his, member wretched soul, split two feet.
Meanwhile the drifting smoke swirled round each one
mixing colors and making the hair grow. From here taking
toughs from the other, while the one grew tall and the
other small neither snake nor spirit could break the stare.
The standing one draw a spare flesh to his head and
fashions two new ears there. Any left becomes nose and
lips puffed out to size.

The prostrate creature's face extends a snout and his ears disappear into his head like a snail withdrawing horns. The tongue, one's hold and capable of speech then splits as what was the fork before now heels up. The smoke subsides. The soul changed into a snake hisses down the valley floor. Close behind, spitting out words of hate the snake made soul. Suddenly he turns his new made back on him saying "Now let Buoso scuttle on his belly as I have had to do along the path."

So I saw the scum of the seventh ring exchange form and reform themselves anew. If my pace failed let the strangeness of it all excuse me. And even though my sight was stuck and my mind whirled those other souls could not scuttle away before I noticed Puccio Sciancato, by his lip, who of the three was unchanged and the last was he who made you weep, Gaville.

Canto XXVI



Florence, rejoice! Your fame so great now, spreads its beating wings over land and sea and your name echoes down in hell itself. I was ashamed to find among the thieves, five of your most eminent citizens. A fact that brings no dignity with it.

We left that place behind by the same stairs that jutting rocks provided for descent, where, as we went our solitary way, through shattered crags and boulders on the ridge, our feet could not advance without our hands.

I know that then I grieved and I feel now the sorrow remembering what was there and more than usual restrain my talent so that it only runs where virtue leads. If a favourable star or better offers me this gift I should use it well.

In that season when he who lights the world, least hides his face and at the hour when flies give way to gnats, the resting peasant on the hill side looking down the valley where he harvests, sees as many fireflies as were fires, that made the eighth pit glow. So I became aware when finally I stood where its depths came in sight. Just as the one avenged by bears was there to see Elijah's chariot depart, when rearing horses flew towards Heaven. And straining his eyes to follow could see nothing more than follow than the solitary flame rise ever higher like a little cloud, so here, in the gullet of the abyss, each flame moves along without revealing it steals a sinner wrapped up within it. I stood on the bridge leaning out to look. Indeed had I not grabbed a rock nearby, might have toppled headlong to the

bottom. My guide who noticed how absorbed I was explained “There are spirits in these flames, each one bound up in its own punishment.”

“Master” I replied “What you say confirms what I had already guessed might be so and I was wanting to ask who is there in that flame that is split in two at the top? Like the one that sprang from the pyre holding Eteocles laid beside his brother.”

“In there Ulysses and Diomedes, are suffering their torment.” He replied “They are joined by just retribution now as once they were by anger. In their flame they groans lament of the ambush of the horse that formed the gateway allowing noble Roman seed to spring forth. They weep as well for their deceit that caused so much grief to Deidamia, who still in death grieves for Achilles. The Palladium too, they pay for that inside the flame.”

“Master” I said “If they can speak within the flames I spare no prayers to beg you. Let me wait until this horned flame has made its way here. Look at me learn towards it with longing.”

He said “Your prayers deserve the highest praise I agree, but please hold back from speaking and let me address them. I think I know what you would ask them. But since both were greek the manner of your language might put them off.”

After the flame had reached us and my guide judged the time and place were right he then spoke and I heard him addressing them like this “You who are two within the single flame, if I earned your approval while alive, if I earned your approval great or small, when in the world I wrote my epic verse, do not move on. Instead tell me the tale, one of you, where his lost self went to die.”

The taller of the ancient flames took horns began to wave and flicker, murmuring just like a flame struggling in the wind. Then while its tip was waving back and forth as if it were a tongue itself that spoke, the flame threw out a voice “When I set sail leaving Circe who had kept me with her for a year or more close to Gaeta, before Aenas gave it new name, not fondness for my son nor duty to an ageing father nor the love of Penelope which would have gladdened her, was able to overcome the longing I felt to gain full knowledge of the world, the vices and the virtues of mankind. So I set out there in the open sea with little company of comrades who had not deserted me. I soared as far as Spain and Morocoo, both shores and left Sardinia behind with the other islands which that sea bathes. My shipmates and I had grown old and slow and finally we reached the narrow straight where Hercules had set up his pillars to warn men not to pass beyond their mark. We passed beyond Seville on the right hand and on the left Ceuta had sunk behind. I said ‘Brothers, after braving with me hundred thousand dangers on the way to reach the West, don't deny yourselves. In the little time allotted to us experience, of what lies beyond the sun, where the world they say is without people. Remind yourselves of the blood

you come from. You are not born to live the life of brutes. But to quest for virtue and for knowledge.' After my briefly spoken speech my crew was so anxious to take the way ahead that I could have hardly heard them back. With us turned towards the morning light we made the oars our wings for this mad flight steadily making distant to the left. By now I saw the night at the sudden stars. Ours never shown above the ocean plane. Five times the flame which lights the moon grew strong. And five times grew weak as we went our way when before us rose a mountain, darkened by the distance that soared to such a height nothing I had ever seen could compare. We rejoiced then but only to despair, for from this land a whirling wind sprang up beating at your ship hard across its bows, it churned the waters whirled use around three times and another fourth it lifted up the stern and sent the prows plunging until the last of the waves closed down on us."

Canto XXVII

The flame which by now was quiet and upright with nothing left to say turned and moved off, the gentle poet giving his consent. Just then another came from behind it. Our attention was drawn towards its tip which emitted strange discordant noises.

As the torturers, Sicilian Bull first bellowed in agony, and this was only just, with the groans of the very one who by his tools had fashioned it, and would always bellow with the voice of its victims so that although made of brass seemed itself pierced with pain, so here having no outlet or passage from the suffering soul inside the flame, any words emerged as the flame's language. But after they had found their way to the tip and given it the same quiver as the sinner's tongue, we heard "You, to whom my voice turns, who spoke just now, in Lombard accent saying 'Go now I ask you nothing more'. Although I come to you a little late perhaps it will not trouble you to talk. I am not troubled and I am burning. If you have fallen into this blind world only recently from that sweet latin land from which I carry my load of guilt, say, is the Romagna at peace or war? Those hills between Urbino and where the springs have Tiber rise or where I called home."

While I was leaning forward to listen my leader tapped me gently on the back and said "You speak. He is Italian." I, waiting to answer, began speaking without delay "O soul, within the flame. Romagna is not now nor ever was lacking war within its tyrants' hearts. Though when I left

her there was no open strife. Now I beg you. Be so kind as to tell us who you are. Be not more stubborn than the rest have been, so your name may endure.”

After the flame had roared in its own way for a moment it moved its pointed tip this way and that and until at last it shaped its breath to speech. “If I believed I answered to a soul who might return to the world up above this flame would stop its moment and stand still. But since no soul was ever known to find, if I have heard right, the pathway back alive, I will answer without fear of infamy. I was a soldier but became friar. Convinced wearing the core would make amends. But for the high priest and let hell take him who duped me into sinning once again, my hopes which surely have been realised of how and why it went out, I will tell you now. While I was in that form of flesh and bones my mother gave me, my deeds were less lion and more fox. Wiles and secret ways, I knew them all. And so employed those arts that my renown spread far and wide on earth. But when I saw the time had come for me as it does in the life of every man to furl the sails and gather in the ropes, what pleased me once now filled me with remorse. I repented, I confessed, I took vows. O misery to think it could have worked! But then the prince of Pharisees chose war near the Lateran instead that of against the Saracens or Jews, he asked me for my counsel. I kept it, for his words seemed like those a drunk might say. But he persisted ‘Trust me. Have no fear, I absolve you in advance. Now teach me how to raise Palestrina to the ground. You cannot deny I have the power to lock and unlock Heaven, the two keys which my predecessors

hardly cared for are mine.' Then he heaped up way too reasons, so silence seemed the worse offence. I said 'Father, since you washed me clean of the sins which I find I must commit, my advice is to promise much but don't deliver. This will bring you the triumph that you seek.' St. Francis came for me when I was dead. But a black Cherubim cried out instead 'Leave him I claim this soul as one of mine. He must come down below and join my slaves. He gave false counsel. Since then I have waited to grab him by the hair. Absolution requires repentance, but to will a thing repented once is not possible. The thing itself is contradictory.' O Wretched me! The shock when he laid hold and said 'Perhaps you never realised I might be something of a logician!' He dragged me down to Minos who entwined his tail eight times around his horny back and then his friends in rage picked into it 'This culprit is for the thieving fire.' He said, which is why I am here lost as you see going bitterly about wrapped like this."

In silence the miserable flame moved off in grievous pain with its horn flickering. My guide and I went on along the cliff until we reached the bridge across the ditch where those who spread the discord receive the reward.

Canto XXVIII



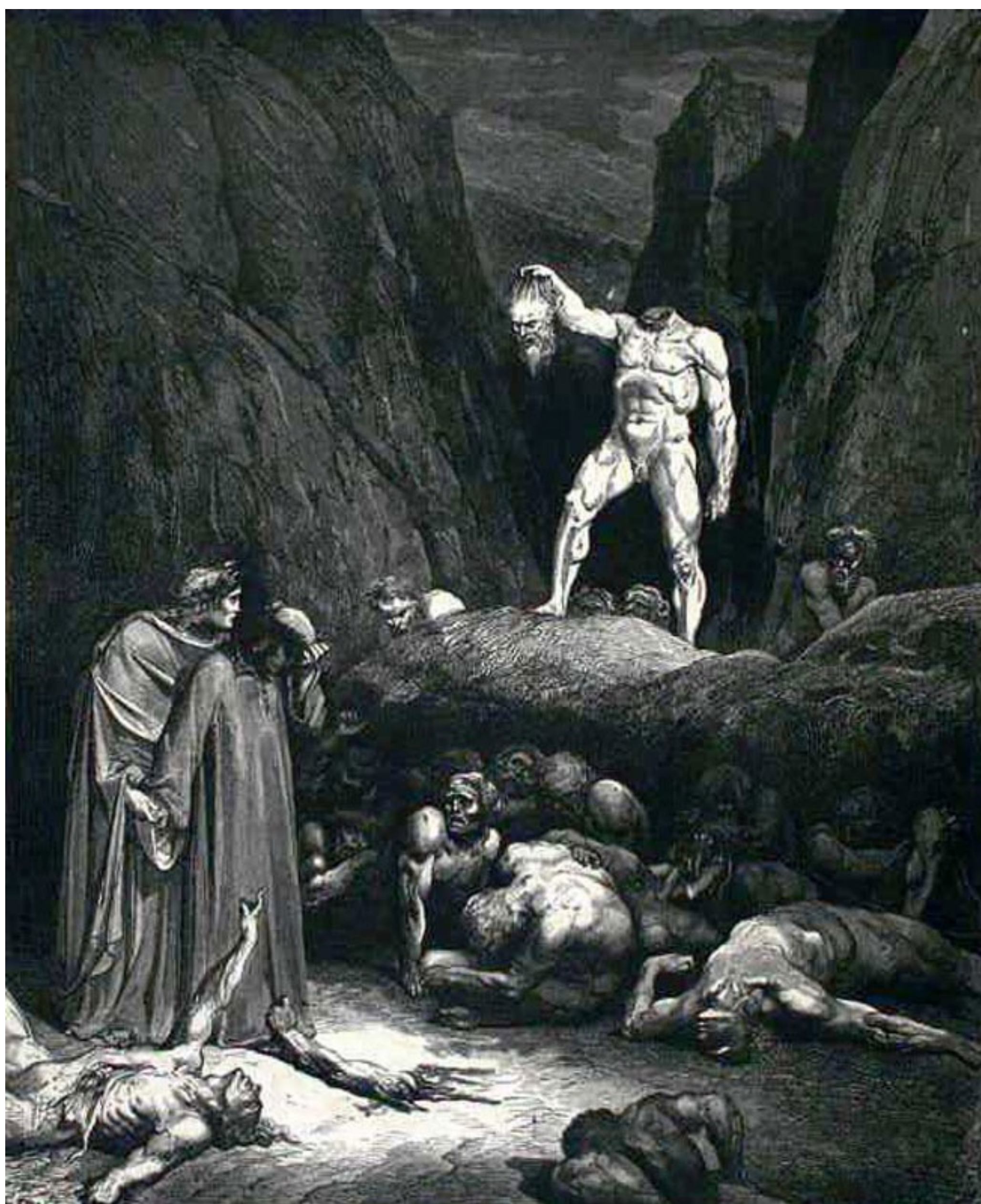
Who, even with the freest flowing words told and retold, could ever quite describe the scene of bloody suffering than I saw. For surely any tongue that tried would fail. The shallow depths of language and of speech are not so sufficient to understand such pain.

If all those men stood here together who once on Puglia's fateful earth mourned their life blood shed at the Trojan's hands as well as those who fell in the long war that ended with great spoil of looted rings as Livy truly writes in his

history and those who felt the agony of wounds, taking a stand against Robert Guiscard. Those others too whose bones are still heaped up at Ceperano where each Apulian proved false and add Tagliacozzo where unarmed old Alardo gained the day and if everyone should display their limbs hacked off or pieced through, it would still not be as the gory horrors of the ninth ditch.

No barrel bursted splintered hoops wider than the soul I saw split from chin to ass so his guts hung out down between his knees and the sack that turns whatever swallowed into excrement.

While I watched intently he looked at me and with his hands opened his chest wide and said “See how I tear myself. See how Mahomet is a mangled thing. Ali makes his way before me weeping. His face split from the hairline to the chin. These spirits you see around me here sowed schism and dissension in their lives, for in this death you see them ripped apart. Back there a devil butchers us, each one again and again, slicing with the sword because our wounds close up round this circuit, healed by the time we are where he stands. And who are you dallying on the bridge and trying to put off perhaps going to the place that your punishment decreed when you confused and the sentence was passed?”



“He is not dead yet. He is not called here by his guilt to suffer,” My master said “but so he may gain full experience. I who am dead, must lead him through each round of hell, circle after circle until we reach the very bottom. This is true as I stand here speaking before you now.”

On hearing this more than a hundred souls forgot their torment and paused in stupor to look at me in their astonishment.

“And you who will perhaps will soon see the Sun, tell Fra Dolcino unless he wishes to follow me here quick to arm himself with stocks of food. If he does not, the snow will grant the Novarese victory they might otherwise not find so easy.” Mahomet while he spoke kept one foot raised as if to go. Then having spoken went.

Another sinner his throat slashed through, his nose sheared off and one ear remaining, stopped to gaze at me in stricken wonder. Stepping from the group and bearing his throat he exposed its bloody insides to view and spoke. “O you, whom guilt has not condemned. Whose face I knew above in Italy. Unless some similarities deceive, recall to mind Pier da Medicina. If you return to see the gentle plane that slopes from Vercelli to Marcabo, tell Guido and Angiolello if we have any foresight here in hell, then they will drown by a tyrant’s butchery tied in a sack and bundled from their ships near Cattolica. Neptune never saw from Majorca to Cyprus such a crime committed by pirates or the Argolic. “

One with both hands severed then stepped forward raising the stumps to his face, battering his cheeks with the blood in the mirky air. “Remember Mosca,” he shouted “who said once done its finished with. Seeds of evil for the Tuscan people.”

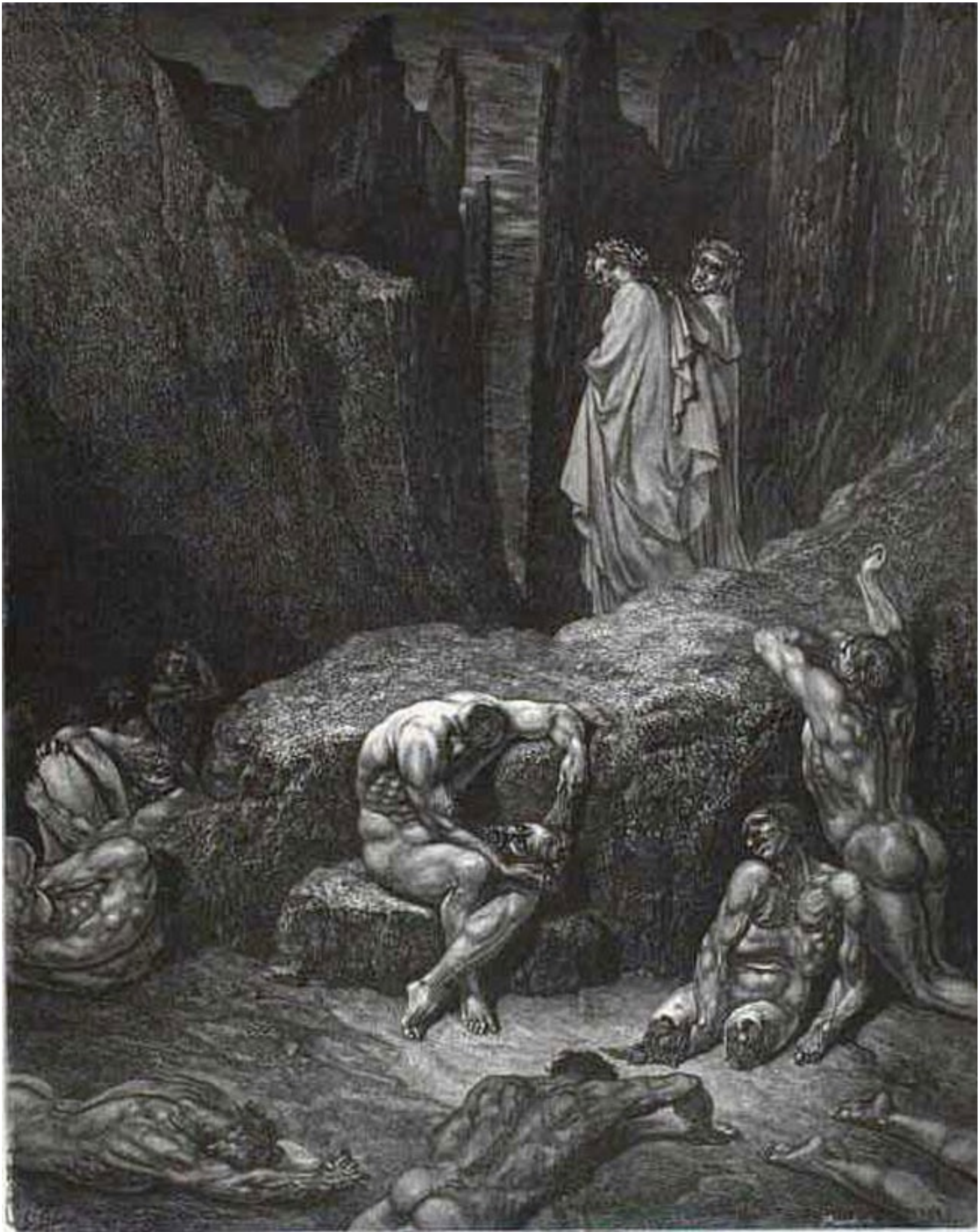
He heard me add “Add death to your family line.” at which with pain, heaped on top of pain, he left, grieving like one driven mad with sadness, but I stayed there watching the company and saw a sight that I should be afraid to speak of had I not seen it myself.

And that, clear conscience, man’s good companion gives me my confidence. I saw and now I see it still, a headless corpse that walked. Just like the others in that dismal herd, the corpse was carrying its hacked off head by the hair swinging it like a lantern. It stared at us and made a sound of pain. He was himself and his lamp, two in one, one in two. How this thing can be? He knows who willed it by decree.

Below the bridge he raised the arm up high to grasp the head so we might hear his words which were “Look well on my monstrous torment, you who comes still breathing to view the dead and then tell me if there is a punishment worse than this. And so you may carry back news of me, know this, I am Bertram de Born who gave such evil counsel to the youthful king. I set father and son against each other. Achitophel no less encouraged hate to grow between David and Absalom. Because I parted those

united monks I bear my head severed from its life source.
Observe in me perfect retribution.”

Canto XXIX



So many souls, so many different wounds that made my sight intoxicated. I long to stay and weep in sympathy, but Virgil said to me “Why stare so hard, why insist on lingering here to watch among these lost and mutilated shades. You moved on quickly from other valleys. If you hope to make a count, remember the circle runs around for twenty-two miles. The moon is already beneath our feet. Our allotted time begins to run shorter. There is much more which you have not seen.”

“Had you considered why I was looking,” I began “You might have let me stay on”. But my guide had already moved ahead, so I spoke as I was walking after him. “Somewhere in that ditch I stared at just now, I think there is a spirit of my kin, mourning the debt which never can be paid.” My guide answered me “Think no more of that. Attend to other things and leave him there. I noticed him standing beneath the bridge pointing a threatening finger at you and heard his name called Geri del Bello. This was while he as so preoccupied with the lord of Altaforte and why you did not look at him before he left.”

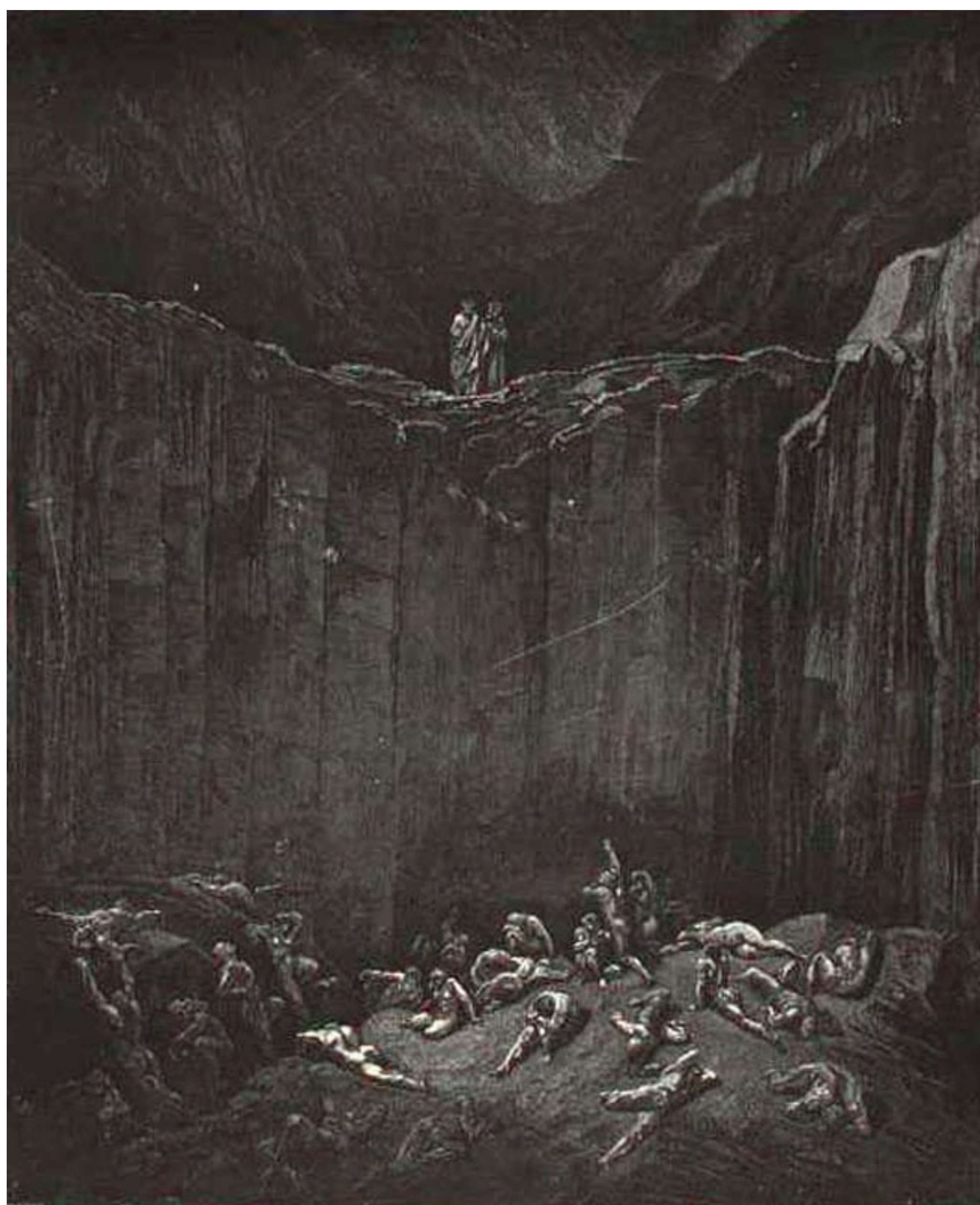
“O my guide, it was his death by violence not yet avenged by those who shared the shame which made him so disdainful. This I think is why he continued without a word. And only makes me pity him the more.”

And so we spoke, continuing along the bridge until we reached the point from where with more light we would have seen the bottom of the next valley. From our position there, high up along the final cloister of the Malebolge, we

saw exposed beneath us its tortured congregation. Strange sounding lamentations pierced me like arrows barbed with pity. And with this I had to raise my hands to block my ears. The noises of suffering were as if crammed in one ditch. They were all the deceased of the Valdichiana hospital and for Maremma and Sardinia between the July and September months with the fetid stench of their rotting limbs.

Still keeping to the left we descended the long ridge to the final bank. And here the view was clearer revealing the depths where justice, infallible minister of the Lord, deals her punishment to those registered as falsifiers.

The pain I think cannot have been greater when all Aegina was stricken with plague. And pestilence was carried in the air, so every animal to tiny worm succumbed. The ancient people, its claimed by poets to be the truth, were restored later on from the families of ants. Then here along the mirky valley floor where shades lay languishing in scattered heaps, some were sprawled on another's stomach, some across the spirits back or moving on all fours crawling along the dismal track.



We went on in silence walking slowly to hear and see in their dis-ease, the souls who lacked sufficient strength to raise themselves. I saw too sitting propped up back to back like pans left out to dry, each one with scabs covering their bodies from head to toe. And I know the currycomb plied by the stable boy who knows his master is waiting for him or one kept from his sleep reluctantly to ply to currycomb with such speed as these applied their nails to scratch themselves. Clawing at their flesh, maddened by a fierce and raging itch allowing no relief, their nails scraped on the scabs like a knife shearing scales from bream or some bigger fish with coarser scales.

“You who scrape your armour with fingers making do for pincers,” my guide began addressing one of them “may your fingers be ever equal to their task through out eternity. Are there souls from Italy with you here?”

“We are ourselves Italian. The two disfigured wretches you see before you.” one answered through his tears, “But who are you who asks this of us?”

My guide said to them “I am journeying together with him, this living man descending from circle to circle. I mean to show him all hell.”

With this their mutual support broke off both turned to look, so did others who had heard, drawing close to me my kind master said “Speak now, ask them anything you want to.”

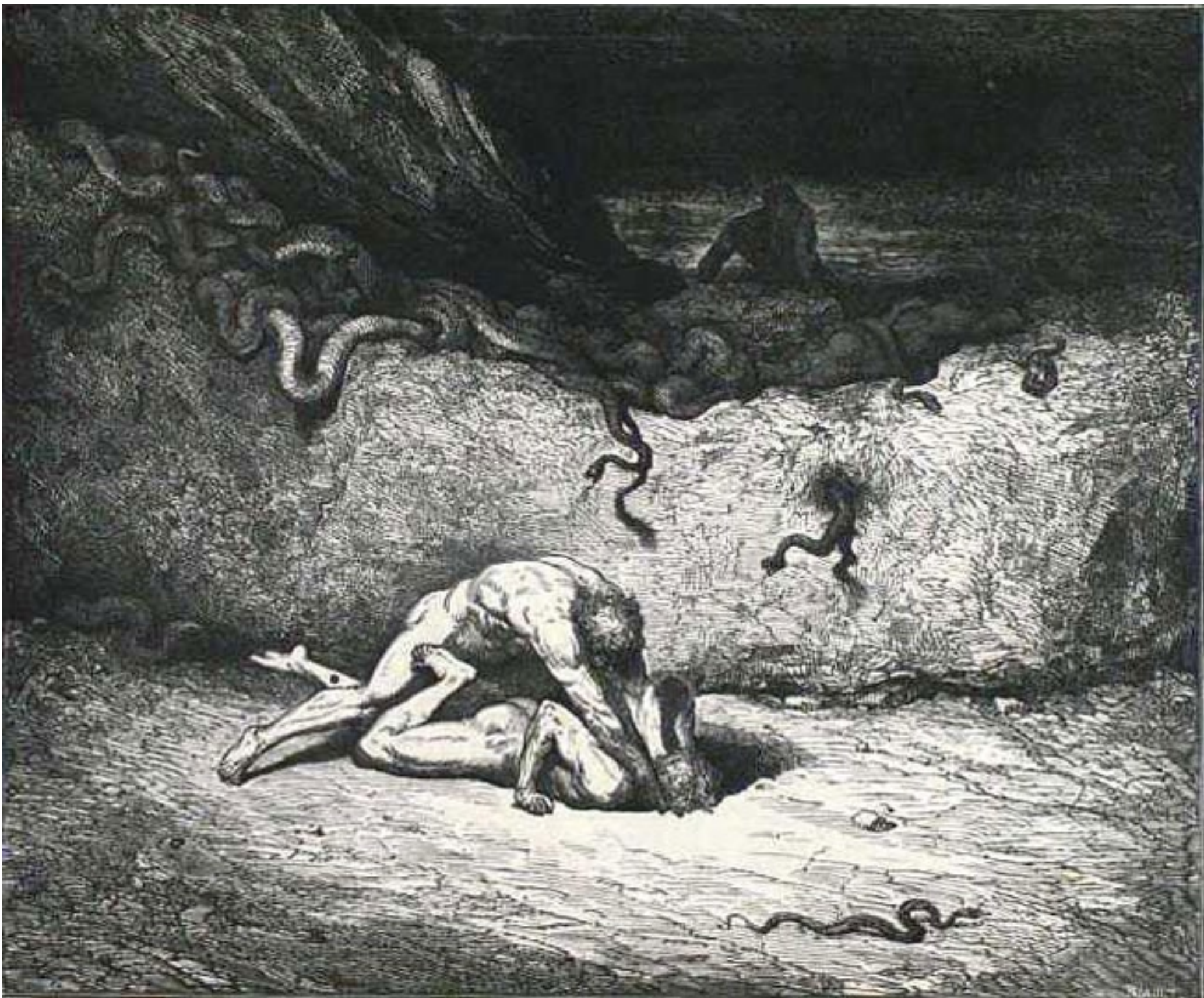
So I began speaking just as he said. “That memory of you may never fade from men’s minds in the world above. Rather so it lives on under many suns, tell us who you are and where you come from? And don't let you foul and loathsome torment inhibit you from speaking openly”.

One answered me “I was from Arezzo. Albert of Siena had me burned. But what I died for does not bring me here. It is true I told him but joking of course. I knew I would fly myself through the air. He curious but not so blessed with sense wanted the demonstration of the art, then because I failed to make him delirious, the one who called me father had me burned. I was dispatched to this tenth and last ditch by Minos who does not err in his judgement. For the alchemy I practiced living.”

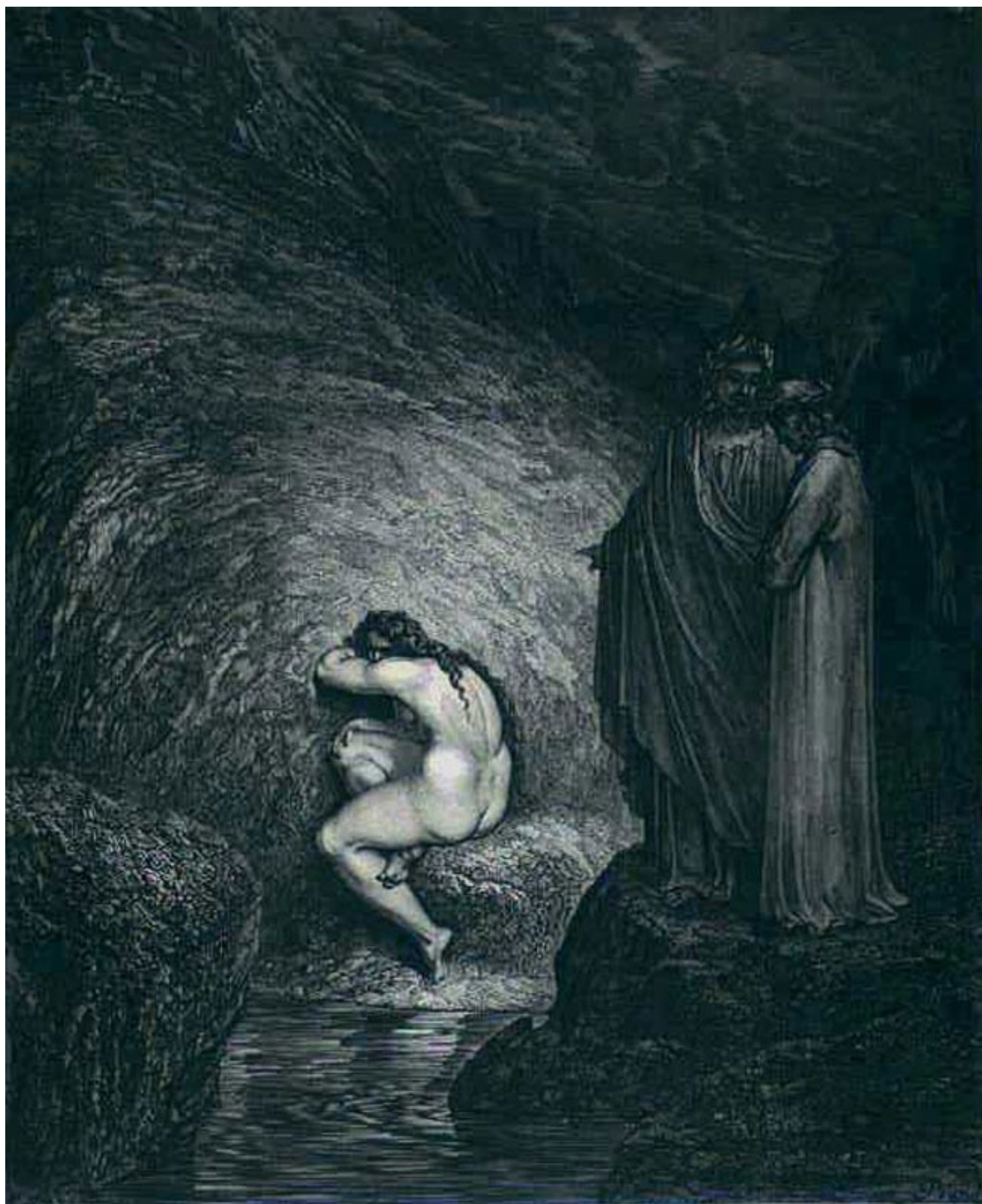
To the poet I said “Was there ever a people so vain as the Sienese. Even the French cannot compare with them.” The leprous creature, hearing this responded to me “Excepting sticker who knew how to spend in moderation, and Niccolo who first introduced the clove in that garden where such fancies take route leaving Caccia d'Ascan's club where he squandered his vineyards and forests and where Abbagliato displayed his wit. I mean so you know who is your second here against the Sienese, look closely here. Our face will give you clues to help you guess. Capocchio’s ghost, the counterfeiter of metals with the aid of alchemy surely, you will recall. If I trust my eyes, the masterful ape of nature I was.”



Canto XXX



When Juno furious with Semele, showed her wroth against these of Theban blood, time and time again and when Arthamas was driven so mad by her that seeing his wife passing by, cradling both their sons he cried “Now let’s spread the nets and catch the lioness together with her cubs.” And reaching out with his pityless claws grasped the boy who bore the name Learchus, swung him round and dashed him against the rock. She drowned herself then with the other son. Or as when the wheel of fortune turning, brought low immeasurable Trojan pride so the king together with his kingdom was destroyed. Wretched Hecuba made slave and crazed by grief after Polyxena was killed before her and Polydorus found unburied and washed up on the shore began to bark like a dog. Yet no fury of Troy or Thebes could compete in rending beasts and even human limbs with those two shades I saw. Pale and naked, running around aimlessly biting at things like a pig does, broken loose from its tie. One threw himself on Capocchio's neck and sank his teeth in deep dragging him off scraping his belly on the rocky ground. The Aretine shaking was left behind, “Gianni Schicchi that foul fiend, crazy, venting his fury like that on people” “Oh” I replied “So that other shade never sinks its fangs in your back, tell us what he is called before he vanishes, “ He said to me “That is the ancient soul of infamous Myrrha, whose love towards her father went beyond love’s limits. She went to him disguised as another and then sinned in love by lying with him. Just as the other spirit there fleeing masqueraded as Buoso Donati and threw up a false will so that he might pick the best horse of his father’s stable.”



When the rabid spirits had come and gone whom I had eyed with such close attention, I turned to watch the other evil souls. One as fashioned exactly like a lute, had he only been cut off at the groin from that part of his body where it forks. The heavy dropsy, swelling the body with great bags of undrained fluid, making the face a poor match for his paunch, forced his parched lips to gape, one curling up one down like the hectic suffer with thirst.

“You who go in this grim world unpunished,” He said
“Why, I cannot think, pause to look here at Master Adam’s misery. Alive I had everything I could want. Now I crave the smallest drop of water. Little streams trickle from the hills in Cassentino down to the Arno. Their bank so cool and soft and damp, flow before me constantly. I am wrapped by their memory. Their image taunts me. It leaves me far more parched than this disease, which makes the flesh of my face to waste away.”

I asked him “Who is that pair of wretches steaming like damp hands during the winter lying next to your body?”

“They were here when I fell like rain on this rocky slope. They have not shifted yet nor likely too until the end of time. First here the false wife who lying accused Joseph, the second one seen on, the lying greek, the foul stench, from their is from their burning fever.”

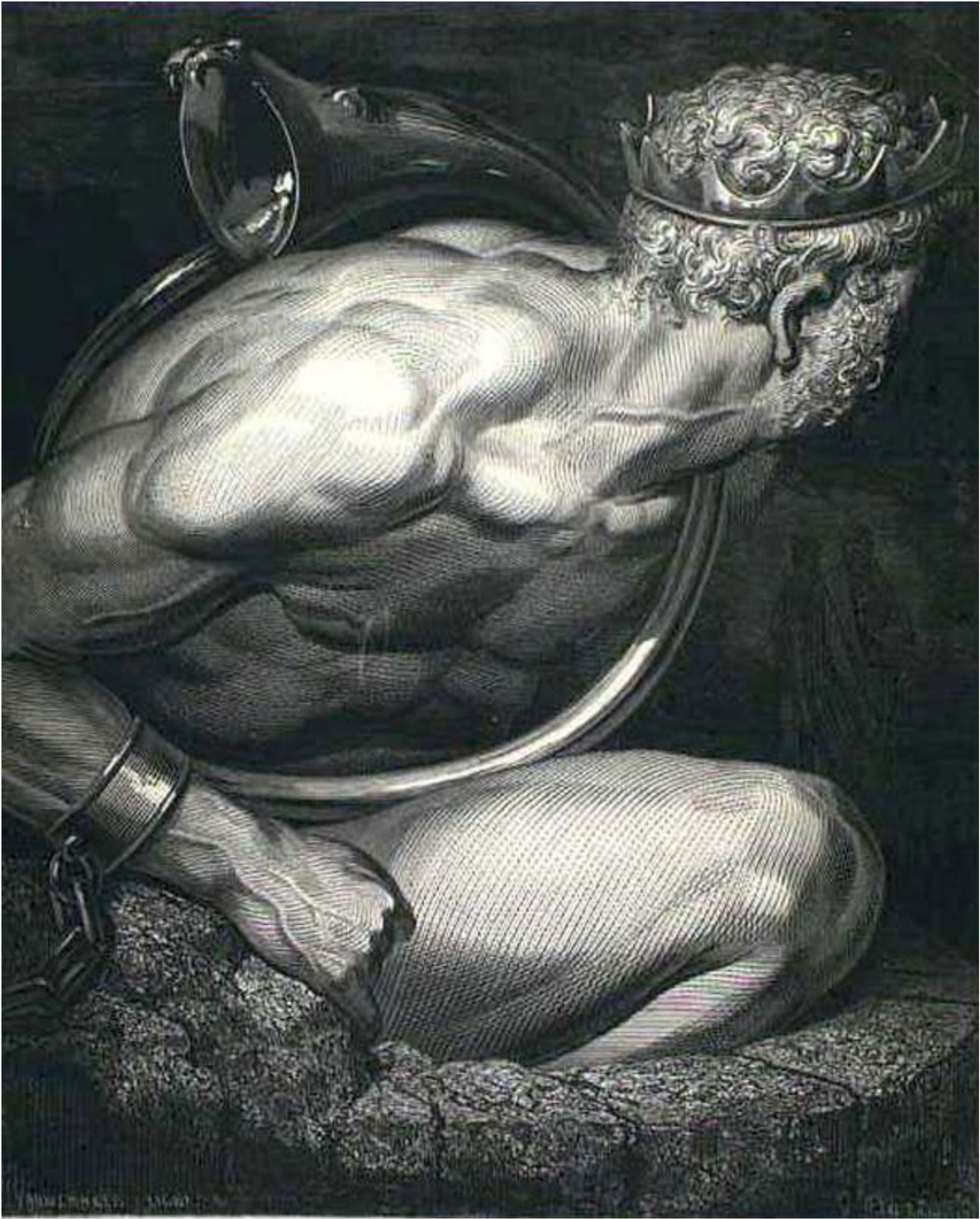
At this one who seemed to be offended being so described, struck out with his fist at Adam’s tight paunch which boomed like a drum. Adam returned the blow striking his

face no less hard. He said “Now my massive limbs prevent me from moving, I have an arm for you when I need it” And the other says “Not so free when they took you off to burn who is quick enough for forgery.” The dropsical one replies “May be true but you did not manage the truth of Troy when they asked you for it.” “I faked truth as you faked coins,” said Sinon, “but one lie. Whereas your deeds rival any daemon’s.” “Enough perjurer, remember the horse,” the one with the swollen belly retorts “The whole world knows your crime.” “May you rot with thirst that cracks your tongue” said the greek “and your paunch upswell with puss that hedge it before your eyes”. The forger said “As usual your jaws burn with fever. If I swell, you burn, if I burst, you ache, it would not take much persuading to make you lick Narcissus’s mirror.”

I lingered interested on listening to every word until my master said “Much longer here and I will quarrel with you.” When I heard him speaking so in anger I turned to him in such shame my memory still keeps it fresh.

As one who dreams he is harmed may dream it wish it were a dream, longing for what is, so then I became. Unable to speak but yearning to excuse myself, I did, though I was unaware of doing so. “Far greater faults than you had been guilty of” My master said “had been cleansed by less shame, so throw off your stress and remember I am with you. If you again arrive where souls quarrel together in this way, wishing to listen is a base desire.”

Canto XXXI



The very tongue whose sting gave colour to my cheeks, supplied in turn the balm, exactly as, so I have heard the spear both Achilles and his father bore, first dispensed the hurt, then the remedy.

So we turned our backs on that valley of misery, climbing the bank that rings it to the other side, crossing in silence. It was not night here nor was it day, so my sight was able to reach only a little way ahead. But now I could hear the blast of a horn, so loud, a thunderclap would have seemed faint. My eyes were drawn by the sound to one place retracing its path to its origin. Not even Roland's horn blown in defeat when Charlemagne had lost his sacred guard sounded a blast so ominous as this.

Keeping my gaze fixed in that direction I made out a cluster of tall towers. "Master," I said "What city lies ahead? Peering that way to penetrate the dark at such a distance your mind goes stray."

He said "You realise when you arrive how much the view has deceived your senses, so push on a little more." Then kindly he took my hand "Before we move closer so it may seem less strange to you" He said ", it is a ring of giants not towers, each one sunk to his navel in the pit."

As through a mist which begins to clear, the vision gradually finds a shape that was hidden in the thick of vapour, so I began to penetrate the mirk coming nearer to the well.

As error left me, terror came crawling in its place. For us on Montereccione's walls tall towers appear to crown the circle. So here the bank that runs around the pit had with half their bulk towering above, horrifying giants that Jupiter still threatens when he rumbles with thunder. I could see the face of one already. The shoulders, chest and most of his stomach and both his great arms hanging by his sides. When nature left off making such beings she acted well indeed to deprive Mars of instruments like these. If elephants and whales are still produced without repent, subtle thinking finds this discreet and just. When reason, evil minds, and massive strength combine mankind is left without defence.

To me his face appeared as huge and high as the great pine-cone of St. Peter's Rome. All his other bones were in proportion. So the bank covering his lower half showed above it such a height a three men from Friesland piled up could not reach his hair. For down from where men fasten up their cloak a reach of thirty hands could be seen.

"RAPHEL MAI AMECH ISABI ALMI," His savage mouth began to bellow forth. No sweeter sound was suitable.

My guide addressed him "So, in your stupidity, keep at your horn. Use that to vent your rage when sudden fits of passion touch you. Look down your neck. Find the strap on which it hangs."

Then he turned to me "Damned by his own words, he is Nimrod and through his evil thought there is no common

language for the world. Lets leave him and waste no more words here for every language is to him as to his sounds to others. No one understands it.”

Turning to the left we continued on until a bow shot distant we found the next, a giant, fiercer and even more vast. Which master had him fettered as he was who could say, but he was bound by a chain, his right arm behind, the other in front which wound five times around his visible part.

“This proud creature shows to test out his strength against the might of highest Jupiter.” declared my guide. So this is his reward. His name is Ephialtes. It was he when the giants struck fear into the gods who challenged them with such awesome endeavour. The arms he moved then, he cannot move now. And I said to him “If its possible I would like to see immense Briareus.” He replied “Quite close to here you can see Antaeus who can speak and is not bound. He will set us on the very floor of hell. The one you ask of is someway distant. Chained up and just as huge as this one here but more ferocious in his appearance.”

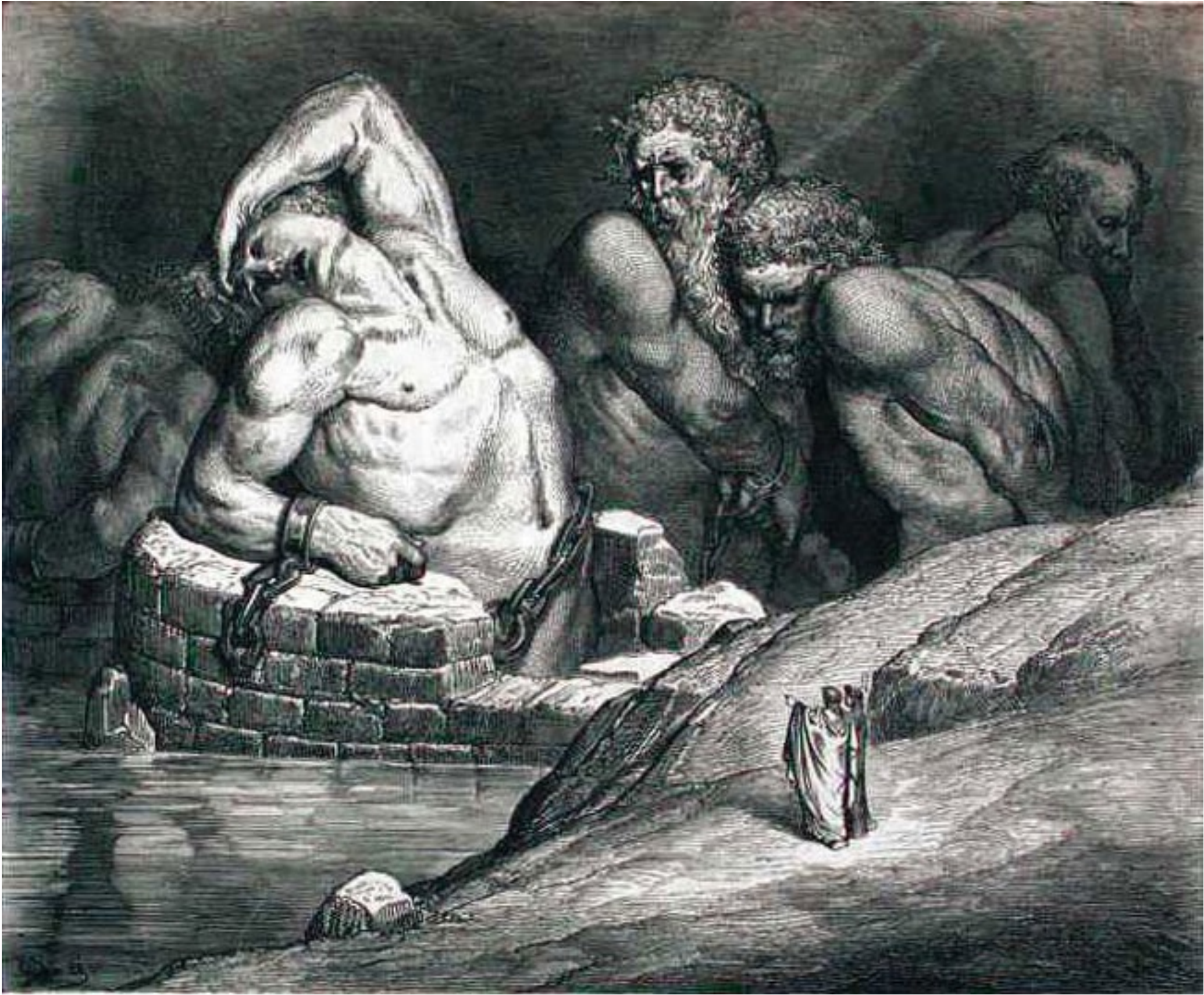
No earth quake ever made a tower shake with greater force than when Ephialtes suddenly shook himself. I feared to die more than ever before. The fear itself would have killed me had I not seen his chains.

We left him and moved on to Antaeus who without his head projected above the world in the rock five full ells or more. “You who lived within that famous valley where

Scipio was made heir to glory, when Hannibal with his army turned back, who snared a thousand lions as your prey and who had you take in your brother's part in the epic war, though some men would say would have brought the son's of earth victory. Do not disdain to lower us where the ice locks Cocytus fast. Don't send us to Typhoeus or Titfus, for this man is able to supply what's craved for here. Bend down here now do not sneer and curl your lip. This man can give you back your fame on earth. He lives and expects to live on longer unless summoned by grace before his time." So spoke my master and at once those hands whose grip clasped Hercules with all its force stretched out and caught my leader. When Virgil felt the hold tightening he said "Come closer so I may seize hold of you" Then he made one single bundle of himself and me.

Just as the tower at Carisenda looks from under the leaning side about to crash when a cloud goes by, so now Antaeus seemed as I stood there waiting fearfully as he lent over. Just then I would have preferred a different road.

He set us down gently on the bottom within the pit that swallowed Lucifer and Judas. He did not stay leaning down but rose again like the mast of a ship.



Canto XXXII



If I possess the harsh and grating style to suit the miserable hole on which the other circling rocks converge and press, I might squeeze more juice from my ideas. Since I don't, I am unwilling to begin. To depict the base of the universe is not an easy task to undertake. Not for tongues that waggle baby prattle. But may those Ladies now aid my verses who helped Amphion when walled up Thebes, so my tale will not stray from what I saw.

O rabble, evil born beyond all others that crowd this place, hard even to describe. Much better you had been created beast. We had reached deep down in the mirky pit below the level of the giants feet and I was gazing at the soaring wall when I had a voice speak addressing me "Watch how you step." It said "Be careful here as you make your way, don't tread on the heads of this miserable fraternity." At this I turned and saw in front of me at my feet a lake so deeply frozen it seemed to be made of more of glass than any ice. The Danube in Austria has never deep in winter showed a crust as thick to veil its currents flow. Nor has the Don beneath its cold sky. If Mount Tambernich or Pietrapana crashed upon it would not creek even at the edges. The way that croaking frogs poke up their heads above the water in the season when the peasant woman dreams of gleaning, just so these wretched souls were locked in ice, blue, up to where our shame displays itself with their chattering teeth sounding like storks. Everyone kept his face bent looking down, their mouths testify to the cold they felt. Their eyes to the misery in their hearts. After looking around a while I glanced down. At my feet I

saw two heads locked so tight that their hair had intermingled.

“Tell me.” I said “You with your chests pressed together who are you?”

At this they bent back their necks and when their faces were raised up to me tears from eyes already wet trickled to their lips and froze bonding them closer. No clamp fastened wood to wood as tightly. Mad with rage, they butt each other like goats. Then one who had lost both ears to the cold spoke with his face still bent over the ice “Why is it you keep on staring at us?”

“If you want to know who these two are here, that valley that Bisenzio comes down was once theirs. And their father Alberto’s. The same mother bore them. Such Caina, you will not find one soul that deserves to be having locked in ice, not even the one whose chest and shadow appears with one blow of Arthur’s. Not Focaccia or this soul who blocks my vision forward with his head. Living he was Sassol Mascheroni. If you are a Tuscan you would have heard of him and to avoid prompting me to say more my own name is Camicion de’ Pazzi. I am waiting here for Carlino’s crime. His guilt would seem to mitigate my own.”

After that I saw a thousand faces purpled with the cold. Overtime since then I felt a shudder at a frozen pond. As we continued on close to that central point upon which all weights converge, I in the relentless cold shivering, by will or fate or simple chance perhaps passing among the heads,

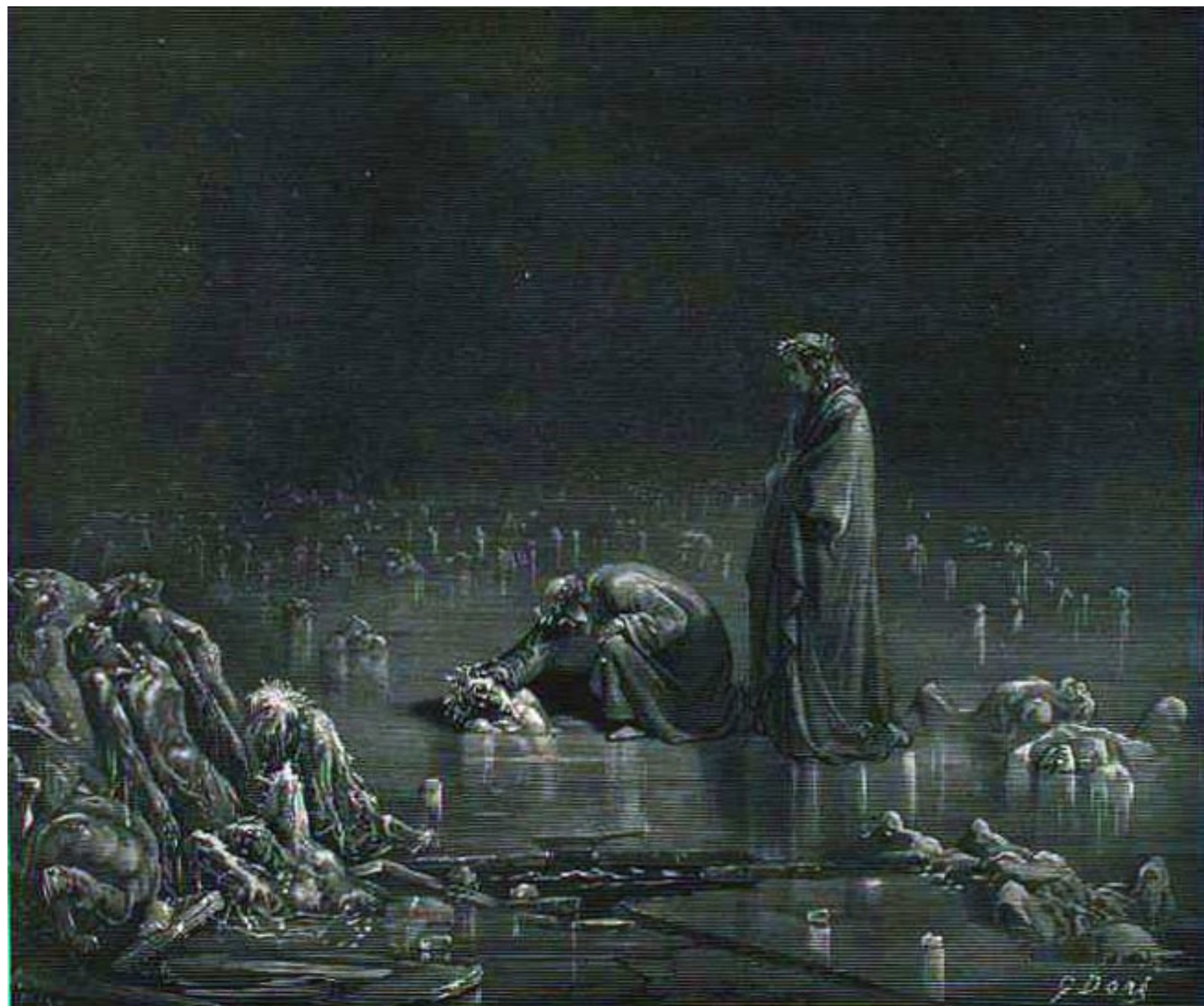
kicked a face, it screams in pain “Why did you kick at me, if you had not come here to take revenge for Montaperti then why pick on me?”

“Master,” I said “just wait a moment here while I resolve my doubts about this man, then we can hurry as you feel the need.”

My guide paused and so I asked the spirit, still cursing as bitterly as before “Who might you be giving out such abuse?”

“And who might you be in Antenora” he replied “kicking at peoples faces harder even than if you were alive.” “I am alive” I replied “and if fame is what you desire you might value me. I can put your name among the others.” He answered “I want the opposite. Go. Don't pester me. You have no idea how to flatter us as deep as in this hell.” At this I grabbed him by the hair and said “Name and Now or the scalp comes off your head.” “Clap my head bold or stamp a thousand times,” he said “I shall not tell you who I am.” My hand already held a twist of hair. I tug some more away. He yelped in pain. “Hey Bocca. What's wrong now?” A voice cried out “Aren't you content with your chattering teeth that you shout now too? What devil has you?”

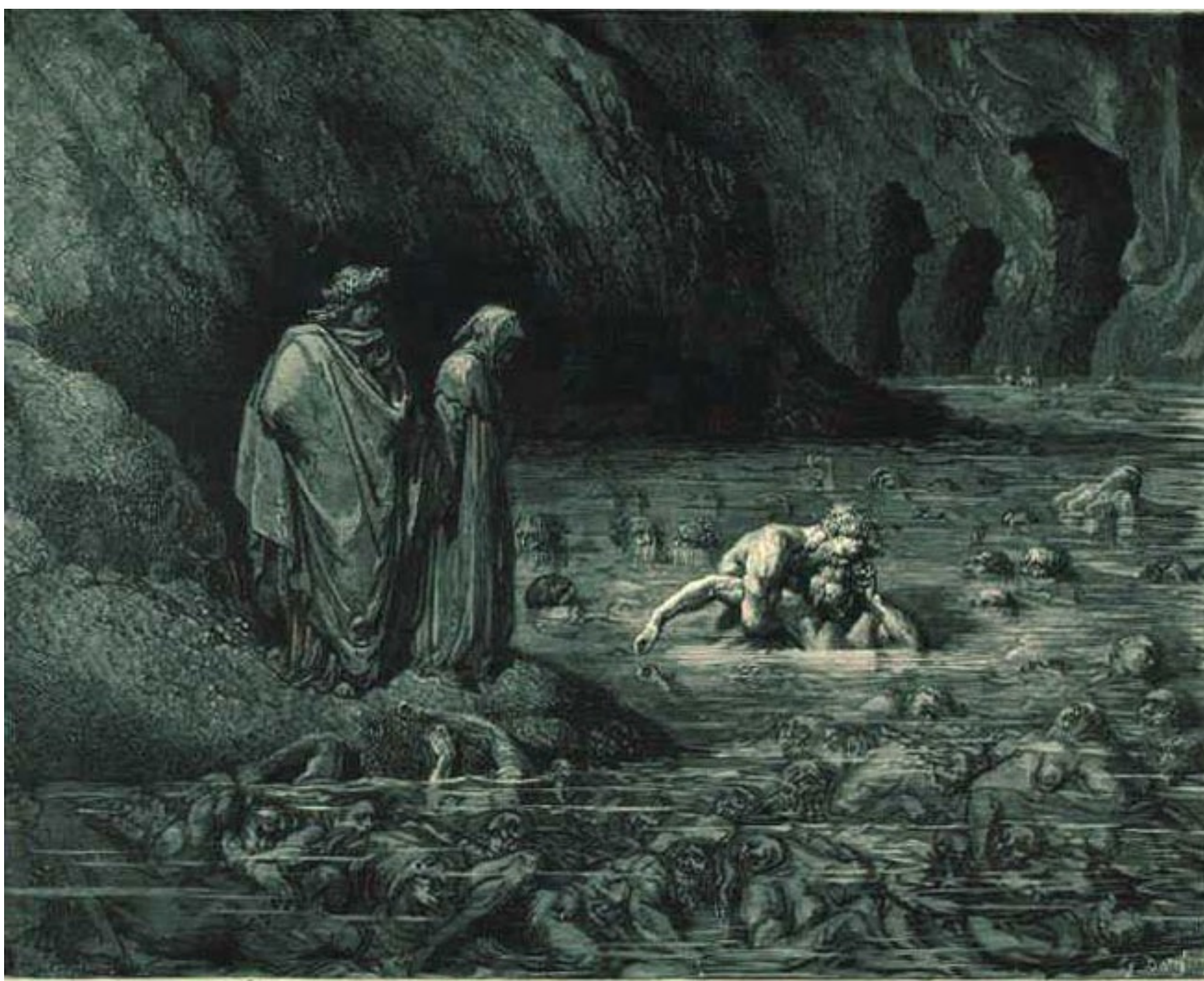
“Enough!” I said “Say no more despite you vicious traitor I will carry the news of you when I return and bring you shame.”



To which he said “Go then. Say what you like. But should you make it back home don't forget to mention him so quick just now to speak. French Silver is what he laments down here. Tell them I saw Daduera down deep in hell where the guilty souls gather to cool off and if they ask who else was there with him say Beccaria was by your side whose gullet was slit right through by Florence and down the way a little I believe lies Gianni del Soldanier, there with Ganellon and Tebaldello who unlocked Faenza's gate as it slept.”

Then moving on we saw two shades sharing the same ice hole and packed so close, one head was on the other like a hat. And like a starving man devouring bread, the sinner above sank his teeth into the brains at the nape of the lowest neck. In fury, Tydeus nor the temples of Menalippus with no more wroth than this one chewed the skull and other parts.

“You! Tell me why you show such animal hatred to the one beneath you devour?” I cried “If your hatred of him is just, I, knowing who you are and what’s his sin shall repay you yet in the world above and as my tongue shrivels before I die.”



Canto XXXIII



The sinner paused then in his savage meal, lifting his mouth and wiping his lips clean with what hair remained on the back of his skull. He then began “You want me to revive a grief so desperate that even the thought before I speak clutches my heart with pain. But if my words are seeds which will one day bear the fruit of this traitor’s infamy whom I know then I shall speak, but weeping. I don't know your name nor how you came here but to hear you speak you sound Florentine. I was count Ugolino. You should know and this is Archbishop Ruggieri. I would tell

you why I am his neighbour. Through his evil plots and my trust of him I was put in prison where I was killed. Though of this I am sure there is no need to speak, what you cannot have heard of however is the manner of my death and how cruel. Hear me first and judge me if he wronged me. Through a narrow window in the tower called the tower of hunger after me and in which many more will be shut up, I glimpsed many moons pass over my head when my evil dream ripped the future's veil. I dreamt this man was master of the hunt pursuing the wolf and wolf cubs into the hills that block out Lucca from the Pisan's view with his lean bitch hounds well trained and eager. With him were the Gualandi, Sismondi and Lanfranchi riding up in front. The wolf, father and sons appear to tire and then what I thought I saw long fangs sunk deep and their flanks ripped open. Waking before the light of dawn I heard the whimper of my children asking for bread in their sleep. You will be cruel indeed if you remain still unmoved by the thought of what my heart was treading. If you are not weeping now do you ever? The children woke. The hour they fed us neared and everyone was anxious from their dreams. Then from below I heard them pounding nails into their dreadful tower's door. Silent I stared into the faces of my sons. I did not weep. Inside I turned to stone. They wept and my little Anselm said 'Why look like that father, why, what's wrong?' And still I did not cry or answer them. All that day and night, till the new sun dawned. The feeble ray found its way through the gloom and I made out four faces like my own. I gnawed my hands with anguish. My children thinking hunger was the cause came to me and said 'But feed on us father, the pain we

would suffer will be less. You were the one who clothed us in this flesh, take it from us' I calmed myself to cause them less distress. We passed that day silent and so the next. Oh heartless earth! You should have gaped for us. We reached the fourth day and my Gaddo cried prostrate at my feet 'Why do you not help? Help me father.' There he died." I watched then as one by one the other three fell dead. With the passing of the fifth and sixth day, I blind now, started groping over them, though dead, calling out their names for two days until the hunger overwhelmed my sorrow."



With his tale told, eyes twisted, he clamped down on the skull again, his teeth like a dog's, sharp and strong tearing against the bone.

Ah! Pisa, stay in the shame in the fair land where the Si is heard. Since your neighbours are slow to punish, may those islands Capraia and Gorgona shift ground to make a barb that dams the Arno and drown every soul. For even if Count Oulogino earned his name with treachery disposing you of your thoughts, it was wrong his helpless children suffered. From there we carried on to where the ice wrapped the tight binding in and around other sinners with faces not turned down but looking up. Here weeping itself keeps them from weeping. Tears become a barrier for their grief which turns in on them adding to their pain. Their first tears gathering together freeze and like a visor made of crystal glass fill up the hollow beneath the eyebrow. Although the cold had sucked the sensation from my face numbing it like a callus, I sensed a wind and wondering from where, I asked "Master what causes this motion? Surely this far down the air is windless." And he said to me "We shall soon be where your eyes will answer that question and see what keeps the down-swept air in motion here."

Then one wretch encased in the frozen crust screamed out to us "Wicked pair! Whose cruelty assigns you to here, the final outpost. Breakaway this icy veil from my eyes so that I may vent a little misery before my weeping freezes hard again." So I said "If you want my help tell me who you are then if i don't may I go down to the bottom of the ice" "I

am Friar Alberigo, who offered fruit from an evil garden. In this place I get dates for ever fig that I gave". "Oh" I said "You are dead already then." "What my body does in the world above I have no knowledge. But Ptolomaea here, the privilege is this. Quite often the soul is thrashed down this level before Atropos slice through its thread and so you may scrape off this glaze of tears more willingly. Let me say, when a soul turns traitor the way I did a daemon takes its place in the body governing its actions until the time when its allotted years have run their course. The soul falls straight down into this cistern, above perhaps, the body still appears of the shade that winters here behind me. But if you are just from there you should know him. Ser Branca d' Oria. Now encased here for many years." "I think" I said "you lie. Ser Branca d' Oria is not yet dead. He still drinks and sleeps and puts on clothes." "Up there in Malebranche's ditch," he said "that seething ditch of clinging pinch, the shade of Michel Zanche had not yet arrived when Branca left his body to a devil just as his kinsmen did who had performed the treachery too as his accomplice. Now, reach out your hand and unseal my eyes."

But I did not. For to be rude to him and his like is sufficient courtesy. Ah, Genoese, strange is the decency. All full of sins festering corruption. Why is the earth not been washed clean of you, along with Romania's most loathsome soul? I found one of you so much the sinner that his soul is already in Cocytus but up above in the flesh still appears alive.

Canto XXXIV



PISAN

“The banners of the king of hell advance towards us.” said my Master moving on “If you would see look ahead for him now.”

Just as a distant windmill turns its sails when a heavy fog begins blowing in or night starts to fall, this it seemed I saw. The gusts of wind were strong and for shelter I drew . We were at last and I tremble to write it in the place where shades were wholly covered by the ice like wisps of straw in glass just showing through. Some were lying flat, some with heads to us, others displaying the soles of their feet and others were in a bow bent feet to face.

When we had travelled far enough ahead my guide felt now it was the time now to reveal that creature who was once so beautiful. He made me stop and stepping to one side he said “Look, here is Dis. Arm yourself now. Gather up all the courage you possess.” How faint and cold I grew up on hearing that. Reader, do not ask, I cannot write it. Words are inadequate for what I felt. I did not die. Nor was I quite alive. Imagine if you can what I was like deprived both of life and of death at once.

The emperor of that realm of despair towered above the ice from mid chest up. A giant's height and mine would be closer than a giant to the length of his arm. Judge how large was the rest of him, with the arms and the body in proportion. If he was once as handsome as he now is ugly when he dared rebel his maker then all sorrow may well issue from him. What amazement when I looked up and saw one head wearing three faces. One in front was red,

the other two joined with this one just above the middle of each shoulder, at the crown all three attached together. The right face with shades of white and yellow, the left was coloured like the people's skin who where come form the Nile descending flows. Two wings spread from under each, immense. I have never seen a ship with sails as huge, not feathered but fashioned more like a bat's. These he beat constantly to keep three winds blowing, locking Cocytus in ice. He wept from all six eyes. Down all three chins poured tears that mingled with the bloody foam. In each mouth his teeth raked to the sinner and ground away to keep all three in pain. The one, the front mouth gripped, found the biting nothing against the clawing of his hide. Often his back was raked clean of skin.

“That soul up there who suffers most torment” said my guide “is Judas Iscariot with his head inside and his legs flailing. Of those two others their heads hanging out being held by the black mouth is Brutus riving there in silent desperation. The other still hefty as Cassius. But night has come once again. Now its time we are on our way we have seen it all.”

As he asked me then I put my arms round him. But when the wings had opened wide enough he grasped the shaggy flank and climbed down holding the matted hair in crusts of ice. Then when we reached the swelling of the hip, straining, my guide manoeuvred upside down, his legs now where his head had been before. He grabbed the hair as if to climb up. I thought that we were going back to hell.

“Hold tight.” he said sounding quite exhausted “By these stairs we leave behind all evil.” Then slipping me through a rocky crevice he settled me on its edge and climbed up carefully working his way towards me. I raised my eyes, expecting I would see Lucifer as I had seen him before but instead I saw his legs sticking up. The ignorant may guess that how that sight confused me not knowing what point I had crossed. “Come now” my master said “and on your feet. We have a way to go the path is not easy. The sun already climbs the morning sky.”

It was no palace hall where we rested but a kind of dungeon built by nature barely lit with a floor rough under foot.



“Before I free myself from this abyss” I said when I reached my feet “, explain where is the ice? How is he upside down? And how in so short a time is it day?”

“You imagine” he said to me “You are still on the other side of the centre where I first gripped the hair of the insidious worm piercing the world and descending, you were. When I turned upside down you passed the point toward which weight from everywhere is drawn. You stand beneath the other hemisphere opposite the side covered by dry-land at the central point of which died the Man whose life and birth was sinless. Your feet rest now upon a little sphere of which frozen Judecca forms the other face. When it's morning here it's evening there. The one whose hair we used for a ladder remains fixed in place as he was before. It was on this side he fell from Heaven. The land once spread out here in fear of him, fled beneath the sea north to our hemisphere. Seeking to escape, the land on this side rushed upwards mountainous and made this cave.”

At the limit of the cave below this place and the farthest point from Beelzebub is a place known not by sight but only by the sound of a stream trickling through eroded rock, slowly winding in a gentle descent. My guide and I came to that hidden road to journey back into the glittering world. We did not care for any rest but climbed. He first, I following until I glimpsed through a round opening, Heaven's beauty. There we emerged to see once more the stars.



